WITH KITCHENER TO KHARTUM

G. W. STEEVENS

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WITH KITCHENER TO KHARTUM

BY

G. W. STEEVENS

AUTHOR OF
'EGYPT IN 1898,' 'THE LAND OF THE DOLLAR,' 'WITH THE CONQUERING TURK,' ETC.

WITH MAPS AND PLANS

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

Mr. Steevens' earlier work, "With the Conquering Turk," was received with such cordial recognition that it is perhaps unnecessary to refer to his qualities as a war correspondent or to his literary gifts. The Anglo-Egyptian expedition is a greater theme, and the writer of these pages has the advantage of a wider experience. He has a broader comparative basis for his observation, and his criticism, which he always offers modestly and as an "amateur," has a higher value. At the same time the power of vivid narration and keen characterization is quite as striking. As one of the most remarkable campaigns of history the Sirdar's movement on Khartum would be an interesting topic at any time, but just now it has a special claim to attention in this country. A fresh experience of war, with the criticism of its management now ringing in our ears, naturally gives an incentive to a comparison which, as a whole, defies the criticism even of non-combatants. How far such a comparison is justified will appear from these pages. The marvelous, machine-like precision of the Sirdar's movements is

JAN 27 1960

described by Mr. Steevens with accuracy and graphic presentation of detail, but he shows with the same clearness the dark background of delays and blunders and futilities in the years that preceded. It was not an affair of one summer. In being at the right place at the right time, and in missing nothing of importance, Mr. Steevens shared in the luck which he attributes to the Sirdar's star; but he had to work for it. He joined the expedition early in 1897, and he toiled along with it to the end. He went through the battles of the Atbara and Omdurman. He entered Khartum with the conquerors, and he saw the raising of the Union Jack on the spot where Gordon fell.

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THE CHIEF EVENTS IN THE ATBARA AND OMDURMAN CAMPAIGNS.

Sirdar asks for reinforcements of British troops	Dec. 31,	1897
British brigade starts for front from Abu Dis	Feb. 26,	1898
" " reaches Dibeika, beyond Berber	March 3,	"
Sirdar leaves Berber	" 15,	"
Concentration at Kenur	" 16,	"
Army moves up the Atbara	" 20,	"
First contact with Dervish cavalry	" 21,	"
Shendi raided and destroyed	" 27,	"
General Hunter reconnoitres Mahmud's zariba	" 30,	"
Second reconnaissance: cavalry action before Mahmud's zariba	April 4,	"
Battle of the Atbara	" 8,	"
Sirdar's triumphal entry into Berber	" 11,	"
Railhead reaches Abeidieh: construction of new gunboats begun	" 18,	"
Railhead reaches Fort Atbara	June (middle)	"
Lewis's Brigade leaves Atbara for south	July (early)	"
Second British brigade arrives at Atbara	Aug. 3-17,	"
Sirdar leaves Atbara for front	" 13,	"
Last troops leave Atbara	" 18,	"
Final concentration at Gebel Royan	" 28,	"
March from Gebel Royan to Wady Abid (eight miles)	" 29,	"
March from Wady Abid to Sayal (ten miles)	" 30,	"
" Sayal to Wady Suetne (eight miles)	" 31,	"
Kerreri reconnoitred and shelled	" 31,	"
March from Wady Suetne to Agaiga (six miles); Omdurman reconnoitred and forts silenced	Sept. 1,	"
Battle and capture of Omdurman	" 2,	"
Funeral of Gordon	" 4,	"
Sirdar starts for Fashoda	" 9,	"
Battle of Gedaref	" 22,	"
Sirdar returns from Fashoda	" 24,	"

GENERAL MAP—EGYPT TO UGANDA

WITH KITCHENER TO KHARTUM.

I.

HALFA TELLS ITS STORY.

To walk round Wady Halfa is to read the whole romance of the Sudan. This is the look-out whence Egypt has strained her vision up-Nile to the vast, silent, torrid, murderous desert land, which has been in turn her neighbour, her victim, all but her undoing, and is now to be her triumph again. On us English, too, the Sudan has played its fatal witchery, and half the tale of Halfa is our own as well as Egypt's. On its buildings and up and down its sandy, windy streets we may trace all the stages of the first conquest, the loss, the bitter failures to recover, the slow recommencement, the presage of final victory.

You can get the whole tale into a walk of ten minutes. First look at that big white building: it is

the Egyptian military hospital, and one of the largest, solidest structures of Halfa. In shape and style, you will notice, it is not unlike a railway-station—and that is just what it was meant to be. That was the northern terminus of Ismail Pasha's great railway to Khartum, which was to have run up-river to Dongola and Debbeh, and thence across the Bayuda, by Jakdul and Abu Klea to Metemmeh. The scheme fell short, like all Ismail's grandiose ambitions; Gordon stopped it, and paid for his unforesight with his life. The railway never reached the Third Cataract. The upper part of it was torn to pieces by the Dervishes, who chopped the sleepers into firewood, and twisted the telegraph-wires to spear-heads; the part nearer Halfa lay half-derelict for many years, till it was aroused at length to play its part in the later act of the tragedy of the Sudan.

Now, twenty yards along the line—in this central part of Halfa every street is also a railway—you see a battered, broken-winded engine. It was here in 1884. That is one of the properties of the second act —the nerveless efforts to hold the Sudan when the Mahdi began to rip it loose. For in the year 1881, before we came to Egypt at all, there had arisen a religious teacher, a native of Dongola, named Mohammed Ahmed. The Sudan is the home of fanaticism: it has always been called "the Land of the Dervishes," and no rising saint was more ascetic than the young Dongolawi. He was a disciple of a holy man named

Mohammed Sherif, and one day the master gave a feast at which there was dancing and singing. Such frivolity, said Mohammed Ahmed, was displeasing to Allah; whereat the Sherif was angry, cursed him, and cast him out. The disciple sprinkled ashes on his head, put a yoke on his neck, and fell at his master's feet, imploring forgiveness. Again Mohammed Sherif cursed him and cast him out.

Angered now himself, Mohammed Ahmed joined a new teacher and became a straiter ascetic than ever. The fame of his sanctity spread, and adherents flocked to him. He saw that the people of the Sudan, smarting under extortion and oppression, could but too easily be roused against the Egyptian Government: he risked all, and proclaimed himself El Mahdi el Muntazer, the Expected Guide, the Mussulman Messiah. The Governor-General at Khartum sent two companies to arrest him: the Mahdi's followers fell on them unawares and destroyed them. More troops were sent; the Mahdists destroyed them: next came a small army, and again the Mahdists destroyed it. The barbarous tribesmen flocked to the Mahdi's standard, and in September 1882 he laid siege to El Obeid, the chief city of Kordofan. His assault was beaten back with great slaughter, but after five months' siege the town surrendered; sack and massacre taught doubters what they had to expect.

The Sudan doubted no longer: of a truth this was the Mahdi. Hicks Pasha's army came down from the

North only to swell the Mahdi's triumph to immensity. Unorganised, unwieldy, afraid, the Egyptians crawled on towards El Obeid, harassed by an enemy they never saw. They saw them at last on November 4, 1883, at Shekan: the fight lasted a minute, and the massacre spared only hundreds out of ten thousand. The rest you know — Gordon's mission, the loss of Berber, the siege of Khartum, the massacre of Baker's levies at El Teb, Graham's expedition to Suakim, and the hard-fought fights of the second Teb and Tamai, Wolseley's expedition up the Nile, with Abu Klea and the Gubar and Kirbekan, the second Suakim campaign and M'Neill's zariba. Everybody knows these stories, so gallant, so futile. I remember thirteen and fourteen years ago being enormously proud and joyful about Tamai and Abu Klea. I was very young. Read over the tale again now—the faltering and the folly and the failure—and you will feel that if Egypt has Baker's Teb and Hicks's ruin to wipe out, England was not so very far from suffering precisely the same humiliations. And in the end we failed, with what loss we still remember, and gave the Sudan away. The second act is not a merry one.

The third was less tragic, but it was perhaps even harder to play. We pass by a mud-walled quadrangle, which was once the artillery barracks; through the gateway you look across sand to the mud ramparts of Halfa. That is the stamp of the days of reorganisation, of retrenchment, of difficulties and

discouragements, and unconquerable, undisappointed work. Those were the days when the Egyptian army was in the making, when Halfa was the frontier fortress. There are old barracks all over it, where the young fighting force of Egypt used to sleep half awake. The brown flanks of those hills beyond the rifle-range, just a couple of miles or so desertwards, have seen Dervishes stealing up in broad day and insolently slashing and stabbing in the main streets of the bazaar. Yet this time was not all unavenged insult: the long years between 1885 and 1896 saw Egypt defended and its assailants smashed to pieces. Little by little Egypt—British Egypt now—gained strength and new resolution.

Four battles mark the stages from weakness and abandonment to confidence and the resolution to reconquer. At Ginnis, on the last day but one of 1885, came the first Anglo-Egyptian strategical victory. The Mahdists had been tactically beaten before—well beaten; but the result had always been that we fell back and they came on. After Ginnis, fought by the British army of occupation, aided by a small number of the new Egyptian army, we stood firm, and the Dervishes were washed back. There were men of the Cameron Highlanders on the Atbara, who had fought in that battle: it was not perhaps a very great one, but it was the first time the enemy had been brought to a standstill. He retired behind the Third Cataract.

Then followed three years of raid and counter-raid. Chermside cut up their advance-guard at Sarras; they captured the fort of Khor Musa, and Machell Bey of the 13th Sudanese drove them out within twelve hours. On the Suakim side the present Sirdar made head against Osman Digna with what irregulars and friendlies he could get together. Then in 1888 Osman waxed insolent and threw up trenches against Suakim. It became a regular siege, and Dervish shells fell into the town. But on December 20 Sir Francis Grenfell, the Sirdar, came down and attacked the trenches at the battle of Gemaizeh, and Osman fell back shattered: never again did he come so near his soul's ambition.

Meanwhile Wad-en-Nejumi — the great Emir, the conqueror of Hicks and the captor of Khartum—had hung on the southern frontier, gathering strength for his attack on Egypt. He came in 1889, skirting Halfa in the western desert, striking for a point in Egypt proper above Assuan. His Emirs got out of hand and tried to get to the Nile; in a hard day's tussle at Argin, Colonel Wodehouse and the Halfa garrison threw him back into the desert again. Nejumi pushed on southward, certain of death, certain of Paradise. At Toski Grenfell brought him to battle with the flower of the Egyptian army. At the end of the day Nejumi was dead and his army was beginning to die of thirst in the desert. Egypt has never been attacked since.

Finally, in 1891 Colonel Holled-Smith marched against Osman Digna's base outside Suakim, the oasis of Tokat. The Dervishes sprang upon him at Afafit, but the days of surprise and panic were over. They were rolled back and shattered to pieces; their base was occupied; and Suakim as well as Halfa had peace. Now all ground was finally maintained, and all was ripe for attack again. England heard little of this third act; but for all that, unadvertised, hard-working, it was the turning-point of the whole drama.

And now we have come to the locomotive-sheds and the fitting-shops, the boiler-houses and the store-rooms; we are back in the present again, and the Halfa of to-day is the Egypt of to-day. Halfa has left off being a fortress and a garrison; to-day it is all workshop and railway terminus. To-day it makes war not with bayonets, but with rivets and spindle-glands. Railways run along every dusty street, and trains and trucks clank up and down till Halfa looks for all the world like Chicago in a turban. In chains, too, for to Halfa come all the worst villains of Egypt. You must know that, till the other day, no Egyptian could be hanged for murder except on the evidence of eyewitnesses—just the people whom most murderers try to avoid. So the rails and sleepers are slung ashore to the jingle of ankle-chains; and after a day in Halfa it startles you in no way to hear that the black foreman of the engine-shop did his five murders, and that, nevertheless, he is a most intelli-

gent, industrious, and harmless creature. On the contrary, you find it admirable that Egypt's ruffians are doing Egypt's work.

Halfa clangs from morning till night with rails lassoed and drawn up a sloping pair of their fellows by many convicts on to trucks; it thuds with sleepers and boxes of bully-beef dumped on to the shore. As you come home from dinner you stumble over strange rails, and sudden engine-lamps flash in your face, and warning whistles scream in your ears. As you lie at night you hear the plug-plug of the goods engine, nearer and nearer, till it sounds as if it must be walking in at your tent door. From the shops of Halfa the untamed Sudan is being tamed at last. It is the new system, the modern system — mind and mechanics beating muscle and shovel-head spear. It takes up and digests all the past: the bits of Ismail's railway came into the Dongola line; the engine of Wolseley's time has been rebuilt, and is running again; the artillery barracks are a store for all things pertaining to engines. They came together for the fourth act—the annihilating surprise of Ferkeh, the masterly passage of Hafir, the occupation of Dongola and Merawi, the swift march and sharp storm of Abu Hamed, the swoop on Berber. They were all coming together now for the victorious end, ready to enter for the fifth act and the final curtain on Khartum.

But that is not all Halfa, and it is not all the Sudan. Looking at it hence from its threshold, the

Sudan seems like a strong and swift wild beast, which many hunters have pursued, none subdued. The Sudan is a man-eater — red-gorged, but still insatiable. Turn your pony's head and canter out a mile; we are at the cemetery. No need to dismount, or even to read the names—see merely how full it is. Each white cross is an Englishman devoured by the Sudan. Go and hear the old inhabitants talk—the men who have contrived to live year in, year out, in the Sudan, in splitting sun and red-hot sand. You will notice it best with the men who are less trained to take a pull on their sentiment than are British officers—with the engineer corporals and the foreman mechanics, and all the other plain, efficient Englishmen who are at work on Halfa. Their talk is half of the chances of action, and the other half of their friends that have died.

"Poor Bill, 'e died in the desert surveying to Habu 'Amed. Yes, 'e's 'ere in the cemetery. No; there wasn't any white man there at the time."

"Ah, yes; he was a good fellow, and so was poor Captain Blank; a real nice man, he was now; no better in all the Egyptian army, sir, and I tell you that's saying a good deal, that is. Fought, too, against it; he was engaged to a girl at home, you know, sir, and he wouldn't give up. I nursed him till the doctor come, and then till the end. Didn't you see him when you was out at the cemetery; he's next to poor Dash?"

"Ah, yes," says the third; "don't you remember that night out at Murat—poor Blank, and poor Dash, and poor Tertius, and you, and me. Five we were, and now there's only us two left. Dear, yes; and I slept in Tertius's bed the night before he took it; he was gone and buried forty-eight—no, thirty-six, it was—thirty-six hours later. Ah, yes; he was a good fellow, too. The way those niggers cried!"

Yes; it is a murderous devil, the Sudan, and we have watered it with more of our blood than it will ever yield to pay for. The man-eater is very grim, and he is not sated yet. Only this time he was to be conquered at last.

II.

THE EGYPTIAN ARMY.

THE Anglo-Egyptian army is not quite sixteen years old. The old Turco-Egyptian army was knocked to pieces by Lord Wolseley at Tel-el-Kebir, and the Mahdi ground the fragments to powder. Out of the nothing which remained sixteen years of British leadership have sufficed to build up an army capable of fighting foot for foot with the victors of Tel-el-Kebir, and accustomed to see the backs of the conquerors of Hicks and Baker and Gordon.

Sixteen years of active service have seen a great increase on the eight battalions which were Sir Evelyn Wood's original command. To-day the Egyptian army numbers nineteen battalions of infantry, ten squadrons of cavalry, one horse and four field batteries, and Maxims, a camel corps of eight companies, and the usual non-combatant services. Lord Dufferin limited the original army to 6000 men, with 25 white officers; to-day it counts three times that number with over 140.

The army is of course raised by conscription. But probably the conscription sits less heavily on Egypt than on any country in the world. Out of ten millions it takes—counting the railway battalions—under 20,000 men,—that is to say, one out of every 500 of population; whereas Germany takes 1 in 89, and France 1 in 66. That is only on the peace-footing, moreover; Egypt has been at war ever since the birth of the new army; no conscriptive nation ever carried war so lightly. On the other hand, the Egyptian soldier is called on to serve six years with the colours and nine in the reserve or the police. The small proportion of men taken enables the War Office to pick and choose; so that in point of physique also the Egyptian army could probably give weight to any in the world. And not only is it the smallest of conscriptive armies—it is also the best paid. The fellah receives a piastre (2½d.) a-day—a magnificent salary, equal to what he would usually be making in full work in his native village.

Even these figures do not do justice to the easy conditions on which Egypt supports her army. For of the eighteen battalions of infantry, six—9th to 14th—are Sudanese blacks. The material of these is not drawn from Egypt proper, nor, properly speaking, by conscription. The black is liable to be enlisted wherever he is found, as such, in virtue of his race; and he is enlisted for life. Such a law would be a terrible tyranny for the fellah: in the estimation of the black

it only gives comfort and security in the natural vocation of every man worth calling such—war. Many of the black soldiers have fought against us in the past, with the same energy and enjoyment as they now exhibit in our service. After each victory the more desirable of the prisoners and deserters are enlisted, to their great content, in one black battalion or another. Every morning I had seen them on the range at Halfa—the British sergeant-instructor teaching the ex-Dervishes to shoot. When the recruit made a bull—which he did surprisingly often—the white sergeant, standing behind him with a paper, cried, "*Quaiss kitir*"—"Very good." When he made a fool of himself, the black sergeant trod on him as he lay flat on his belly: he accepted praise and reproof with equal satisfaction, as part of his new game of disciplined war. The black is a perennial schoolboy, without the schooling.

The black soldier is not adapted to garrison life. They brought a battalion down to Cairo once; but the soldiers insisted on driving about all day in carriages, and then beat the driver when he asked for his fare. Ever since then the Sudanese battalions have been kept on the frontier—either up the Nile or on the Suakim side, wherever there has been fighting to do. Having neither knowledge of civilised enjoyments nor desire for them, they are very happy. Their pay is, properly, higher than that of the fellahin—14s. a-month to begin with and 3¾d. a-day allowance for the

wife and family of such as are allowed to marry. The allowance is given generously, for woman is to the black soldier a necessary of life. On a campaign he must, of course, leave his wife and children behind: there is a large village of them just above Assuan. But since their time, I am afraid, as the frontier has ever advanced up-river, the inconstant warrior has formed fresh ties; and now at Halfa, at Dongola, at Berber, the path of victory is milestoned with expectant wives and children.

It is not so abandoned as it sounds, for the Sudanese are born of polygamy, and it would be unreasonable to expect them not to live in it. Here is a typical case. One day a particularly smart soldier came and desired to speak with his commanding officer.

"I wish to marry, O thou Bey," he said.

"But aren't you married?"

"Yes; but my wife is old and has no child, and I desire a child. I wish therefore to marry the sister of Sergeant Mohammed Ali, and he also is willing."

"Then you want to send away your present wife?"

"O no, Excellency. My wife cooks very well, and I want her to cook my rations. She also is willing."

So, everybody being willing, the second marriage took place. Mohammed Ali's sister duly bore a son, and the first wife cooked for the whole family, and they all lived happy ever afterwards.

Each infantry battalion, black and Egyptian alike, is divided into six companies, which parade between 100 and 120 strong; a battalion thus counts roughly, with band and bearer parties, from 650 to 750 rifles. The normal strength of a battalion is 759. The uniform is much the same for all arms — brown jersey, sand-coloured trousers, and dark-blue putties. Over the tarbush the Egyptians have a cover which hangs down behind over the nape of the neck: the blacks need no such protection from their native sun, and do with plaited-straw round the tarbush, bearing a badge whose colour varies with the various battalions. The infantry rifle is the Martini.

The cavalry are all Egyptians, recruited mostly from the Fayum oasis: a black can never be made to understand that a horse needs to be groomed and fed. The horses are stout, hardy beasts of 13 hands or so: they get through an amazing amount of work, and so do the men, though they are a little heavy in the saddle. The strength of a squadron is about 100; the front rank, as in all civilised armies, carry lance as well as sabre and Martini carbine. Seven of the squadron leaders are Englishmen.

Two batteries of field-artillery are armed with new Maxim-Nordenfeldt quick-firing 9-pounders, or 18-pounders with a double shell—handy little creatures which a couple of mules draw easily. The horse-battery has 12-pounder Krupps, the rest 9-pounders. Each battery has a white commander: all the men

are Egyptians, and their physical strength and teachableness make them almost ideal gunners.

The camel corps is some 800 strong—half black, half fellah. They use the mounted-infantry saddle, sitting astride, and carry Martini and bayonet. There are five white officers.

Of the fellah battalions some are officered by Englishmen, some not. The former are 1st to 4th and 15th to 18th; 5th to 8th are officered entirely by natives. Until this campaign the normal number of white officers has been three to an Egyptian and four to a Sudanese battalion: the latter require more holding, and also usually see more fighting, than the former. Most of them were one or even two short. But for this campaign—the final campaign, the climax for which the Anglo-Egyptian army has existed and drudged sixteen years—the number of British officers had been raised to four in some battalions for the fellahin and five for the blacks. There has been complaining, both in Egypt and at home, that the proportion of British to Egyptian officers seems to grow greater, whereas in theory it ought to grow less; but the objection is political rather than military. Many good judges would like to see a few black battalions officered right through by white men, like our West India Regiment. There is no better regimental officer than the Englishman; there is no better natural fighter than the Sudanese: there would hardly be a likelier force in the world.

The native officers are largely of Turkish, Circassian, or Albanian race, with the qualities and defects of their blood; their standard of professional attainment and duty is higher than that of the Turkish army, their courage in action no lower. Native Egyptians have furnished the army with one or two conspicuously useful officers. There is also a certain proportion of black captains and subalterns among the Sudanese: they are keen, work well with the British, and, of course, are utterly fearless; but, as a rule, lack of education keeps them out of the higher grades.

Finally, we must not forget Sergeant Whatsisname, as with grateful appreciation of fame at Mr Kipling's hands he is proud to call himself. Each battalion has as instructor a British non-commissioned officer: he drills it, teaches it to shoot, makes soldiers of it. Perhaps there is no body of men in the world who do more unalloyed and unlimited credit to their country than the colour-sergeants and sergeants with the Egyptian army. In many ways their position is a very difficult one. Technically they are subordinate to all native officers down to the latest-joined sub-lieutenant. The slacker sort of native officer resents the presence of these keenly military subordinates, and does his best to make them uncomfortable. But the white sergeant knows how not to see unpleasantness till it is absolutely unavoidable; then he knows how to go quietly to his colonel and assert his posi-

tion without publicly humiliating his superior. When you hear that the sergeant-instructors are highly endowed with tact, you will guess that in the virtues that come more naturally to the British sergeant they shine exceedingly. Their passionate devotion to duty rises to a daily heroism. Living year in, year out, in a climate very hard upon Europeans, they are naturally unable to palliate it with the comparative luxuries of the officer; though it must be said that the consideration of the officer for his non-commissioned comrade is one of the kindliest of all the many kindly touches with which the British-Egyptian softens privation and war. But the white officer rides and the white sergeant marches. "Where a nigger can go, I can go," he says, and tramps on through the sun. Early in the year one of them marched with the 4th every step of the road from Suakim—the only white man who ever did it. In action the white sergeant has no particular place or duties, so he charges ahead of the first line. At Halfa, training the recruits, he has no officer set over him, and can do pretty well what he likes; so he stands five hours in the sun before breakfast with his men on the range. He must needs be a keen soldier or he would not have volunteered for his post, and a good one, or he would not have got it. But on the top of this he is also essentially a fine man. Stiffened by marches and fights and cholera camps, broadened by contact with things new and strange, polished by a closer associa-

tion with his officers than the service allows at home, elevated by responsibility cheerfully undertaken and honourably sustained, — he is a mirror of soldierly virtue.

The position of the British officer is as assured as that of the sergeant is ambiguous. No British regimental officer takes lower rank than major (*Bimbashi*); none has any superior native officer in his own corps. The lieutenant-colonel (*Kaimakam*) commanding each battalion is usually a captain or major in the British army, and the *Bimbashis* usually subalterns: so many of both ranks, however, have earned brevets or been promoted, that in talking of officers in the Egyptian army it will be simplest to call a battalion commander Bey, which is the courtesy title by which he is usually addressed, and his British subordinate Bimbashi.

To take a man from the command of a company and put him to command a battalion is a big jump; but with the British officers in Egypt the experiment has richly justified itself. The Egyptian army is an army of young men. The Sirdar is forty-eight years old; General Hunter was a major-general before he was forty. The whole army has only one combatant officer over fifty. Through the Dongola campaign majors commanded brigades and captains battalions; at Abu Hamed, last year, a subaltern of twenty-eight led his regiment in action. With men either rash or timid such sudden promotion might be dangerous;

but the officers of the Egyptian army are at the same time unafraid of responsibility and equal to it. Their professional success has been very great—some whisper, too great. "After Tel-el-Kebir," said a captain in the British brigade, "one of our officers came to me and talked of joining the Egyptian army. For God's sake, don't,' I said; 'don't: you'll spend your life thrashing fellahin into action with a stick.' Now, here am I commanding a company, and a man who was under me in the Kandahar show is commanding a brigade." Certainly the Egyptian officers may have passed over men as good as they; but their luck has lain solely in getting the chance to show their merit.

For after all the fact remains, that while the British campaigns in the Sudan are a long story of failure brightened only by stout fighting, the Egyptian campaigns have been a consistent record of success. With inferior material, at a tithe of the expense, they have worn their enemy down by sheer patience and pluck and knowledge of their business. In the old days campaigns were given up for want of transport; now rations are as certain in Khartum as in Cairo. In the old days we used to be surprised and to fight in square; now we surprise the enemy and attack in line. In quite plain language, what Gordon and Wolseley failed to do the Sirdar has done. The credit is not all his: part must go to Sir Evelyn Wood and Sir Francis Grenfell, his predecessors, and to the whole body of

officers in due proportion. They have paid for their promotion with years on the frontier—years of sweat and sandstorm by day, of shivering and alarms by night, of banishment always; above all, they have richly earned it by success. Now that the long struggle is crowned with victory, we may look back on those fourteen indomitable years as one of the highest achievements of our race.

III.

THE S.M.R.

HALFA is nearly four hundred miles from the Atbara; yet it was the decisive point of the campaign. For in Halfa was being forged the deadliest weapon that Britain has ever used against Mahdism — the Sudan Military Railway. In the existence of the railway lay all the difference between the extempore, amateur scrambles of Wolseley's campaign and the machine-like precision of Kitchener's. When civilisation fights with barbarism it must fight with civilised weapons; for with his own arts on his own ground the barbarian is almost certain to be the better man. To go into the Sudan without complete transport and certain communications is as near madness as to go with spears and shields. Time has been on the Sirdar's side, whereas it was dead against Lord Wolseley; and of that, as of every point in his game, the Sirdar has known how to ensure the full advantage. There was fine marching and fine fighting in the campaign of the Atbara: the campaign would have

failed without them; but without the railway there could never have been any campaign at all. The battle of the Atbara was won in the workshops of Wady Halfa.

Everybody knew that a railway from Halfa across the desert to Abu Hamed was an impossibility—until the Sirdar turned it into a fact. It was characteristic of the Sirdar's daring—daring based on complete knowledge and just confidence in himself and his instruments; but to the uninformed it seems mad recklessness—that he actually launched his rails and sleepers into the waterless desert, while the other end of the line was still held by the enemy. Water was bored for, and, at the third attempt, found, which lightened the task; but the engineers are convinced that, water or no water, the Sirdar's ingenuity and determination would have carried the enterprise through. Long before the line was due to arrive Abu Hamed had fallen: before the end of 1897 the line touched the Nile again at that point, 234 miles from Halfa, and the journey to Berber took a day instead of weeks.

There was no pause at Abu Hamed; work was begun immediately on the 149-mile stretch to the Atbara. At the beginning of the year, when the rumours of Mahmud's advance began to harden into credibility and the British regiments were started up the river, rail-head was some twenty miles south of Abu Hamed. The object, of course, was to push it on south of the series of rapids ending at Geneineteh,

some twenty-odd miles short of Berber, which are called the Fifth Cataract. On the falling river camel portage had to be used round the broken water, which was a serious difficulty in the way of the transport A second object in hurrying on the work was to get the sections of the three new gunboats to the same point south of the cataract, where they could be put together ready for the final advance.

It was a heavy strain, for the railway had not only to carry up supplies and stores: it had also to carry the materials for its own extension. There is no wood for sleepers between Abu Hamed and the Atbara, much less any possibility of providing rails. So that all day long you heard the wailing lilt, without which no Arab can work in time; all day at intervals the long material train pulled out from the beach-siding piled up with rails and sleepers, paused awhile at the bank of sand which is the platform of the northern terminus, and in due time puffed off southward till it was lost among the desert sand-hills.

It was a heavy handicap that an infant railway should be asked for double work, but that was only the beginning of the difficulty. The S.M.R., like every thing else in Egypt, must be worked on the cheap. There is no trouble about the labour—the Railway Battalions supply that. The Railway Battalions are raised by conscription, only instead of fighting with Martini and bayonet the conscripts fight with shovel

and pick. I have heard it called the *Corvée* in another form: so, if you like, it is. But it is no more *Corvée* than the work of sappers in any European army. The fellah has to shovel for his country instead of fighting for it, and he would much rather. It is war service which happens to retain a permanent value when war is over; so much the better for everybody.

But if navvy labour is abundant and cheap and efficient, everything else is scarce and cheap and nasty. English firemen and drivers are hard to get, and Italian mechanics are largely employed—so much so, that the Director of Railways has found it worth while to spare a café for them out of his cramped elbow-room. As for native mechanics, there are branches of work in which they are hopeless. As fitters they are a direct temptation to suicide, for the Arab mind can never be brought to see that a tenth of an inch more or less can possibly matter to anybody. "*Malesh*," he says, "it doesn't matter; shove it in." And then the engine breaks down.

As for engines and rolling-stock the S.M.R. must make the best of what it can get. Half-a-dozen new engines of English breed there were when I got to Halfa—fine, glossy, upstanding, clean-limbed, powerful creatures; and it was a joy to watch the marvelling black sentry looking up to one of them in adoration and then warily round lest anybody should seek to steal it. There were others ordered, but—miracle of

national lunacy!—the engineering strike intervened, and the orders had to go to Baldwin's of Philadelphia. For the rest the staff had to mend up anything they found about. Old engines from Ismail's abortive railway, old engines from Natal, from the Cape, broken and derelict, had to be patched up with any kind of possible fittings retrieved and adapted from the scrap-heap. Odd parts were picked up in the sand and fitted into their places again: if they were useless they were promptly turned into something else and made useful. There are a couple of Ismail's boilers in use now which were found lying miles away in the desert and rolled in by lever and hand. In the engine-shed you see rusty embryos of engines that are being tinkered together with bits of rubbish collected from everywhere. And still they move.

Who moves them? It is part of the Sirdar's luck—that luck which goes with genius—that he always gets the best conceivable subordinates. Conceive a blend of French audacity of imagination, American ingenuity, and British doggedness in execution, and you will have the ideal qualities for such a work. The Director of Railways, Bimbashi Girouard, is a Canadian, presumably of French derivation. In early life he built a section of the Canadian Pacific. He came out to Egypt for the Dongola campaign—one of three subalterns specially chosen from the Railway Department of the Royal Engineers. The Sudan killed the other two out of hand, but Bimbashi

Girouard goes on building and running his railways. The Dongola line runs as far as Kerma, above the Third Cataract. The Desert Line must wait at the Atbara for a bridge before it can be extended to Khartum. But already here is something over five hundred miles of rail laid in a savage desert—a record to make the reputation of any engineer in the world, standing to the credit of a subaltern of sappers. The Egyptian army is a triumph of youth on every side, but in none is it more signal than in the case of the Director of Railways. He never loses his head nor forgets his own mind: he is credited with being the one man in the Egyptian army who is unaffectedly unafraid of the Sirdar.

Having finished the S.M.R. to the Atbara, Bimbashi Girouard accepted the post of Director-Genera of all the Egyptian railways. There will be plenty of scope for him in the post, and it will not be wasted. But just reflect again on this crowning wonder of British Egypt — a subaltern with all but Cabinet rank and £2000 a-year!

When the time came to go up by the desert line an engine, two trucks, and a fatigue-party called at the door for our baggage: that is the advantage of a railway-traffic managed by subalterns. We had the luck to get berths in the big saloon. It is built on the Indian plan—four beds in one compartment, eight in the other, plenty of room on the floor, and shutters everywhere to keep out the sand. The train looked as if the other

end of it must be at Abu Hamed already—a vista of rails, sleepers, boxes, camels, and soldiers, and two turkeys, the property of a voluptuous Brigadier, bubbling with indignation through the darkness. However she ran out smoothly enough towards midnight. We slept peacefully, four of us — the other made night hideous with kicks, and exhortations to visionary soldiers to fire low—and in the morning woke up rather less than a hundred miles on our way. But then the first hundred miles is all up-hill, though the gradient is nowhere difficult. The train ran beautifully, for while the surface sand is very easy to work it has a firm bottom, and the rails do not settle. All day we rumbled on prosperously, with no mischance more serious than a broken rail, and we crawled safely over that.

Half the day we read and half the day we played cards, and when it grew dark we sang, for all the world like Thomas Atkins. Every now and then we varied the monotony with a meal; the train stopped frequently, and even when it did not the pace was slow enough for an agile butler to serve lunch by jumping off his truck and climbing on to the saloon foot-board. The scenery, it must be owned, was monotonous, and yet not without haunting beauty. Mile on mile, hour on hour, we glided through sheer desert. Yellow sand to right and left—now stretching away endlessly, now a valley between small broken hills. Sometimes the hills sloped away from us, then they closed in again.

Now they were diaphanous blue on the horizon, now soft purple as we ran under their flanks. But always they were steeped through and through with sun — hazy, immobile, silent. It looked like a part of the world quite new, with none of the bloom rubbed off. It seemed almost profanity that I should be intruding on the sanctity of the prime.

But I was not the first intruder. Straight, firm, and purposeful ran the rails. Now they split into a double line: here was another train waiting—a string of empty trucks—and also a tent, a little hut made of sleeper baulks, a tank, points, and a board with the inscription "No. 5." This was a station—a wayside station. But No. 6 is a Swindon of the desert. Every train stops there half-an-hour or more to fill up with water, for there is a great trifoliate well there. Also the train changes drivers. And here, a hundred miles into the heart of the Nubian desert, two years ago a sanctuary of inviolate silence, where no blade of green ever sprang, where, possibly, no foot trod since the birth of the world, here is a little colony of British engine-drivers. They have a little rest-house shanty of board and galvanised iron; there are pictures from the illustrated papers on the walls, and a pup at the door. There they swelter and smoke and spit and look out at the winking rails and the red-hot sand, and wait till their turn comes to take the train. They don't love the life—who would? —but they stick to it like Britons, and take the trains

out and home. They, too, are not the meanest of the conquerors of the Sudan.

Towards dusk mimosa bushes, dotted park-wise over the sand, began to rise up on both sides of us, then palms; soon we were in a thickish scrub. The air cooled and moistened from death to life: we were back again on the Nile, at Abu Hamed. Thereafter we slept peacefully again, and awoke in the midst of a large camp of white tents. They unhooked the saloon, but the train crawled on, disgorging rails and sleepers, till it came to a place where a swarm of fellahin was shovelling up sand round the last metals. The naked embankment ran straight and purposeful as ever, so far as you could see. Small in the distance was a white man with a spirit-level.

IV

THE CORRESPONDENT'S PROGRESS.

I SAT on a box of tinned beef, whisky, and other delicacies, dumped down on a slope of loose sand. Round me lay another similar case, a tent, bed, and bath, all collapsible and duly collapsed into a brown canvas jacket, two brown canvas bags containing saddlery, towels, and table-linen, a chair and a table lashed together, a wash-hand basin with shaving tackle concealed inside its green canvas cover, a brown bag with some clothes in it, a shining tin canteen, a cracking lunch-basket, a driving-coat, and a hunting-crop. On one side of me rose the embankment of the main line to Berber; fifty yards on it ended suddenly in the sand, and a swarm of Arabs were shovelling up more of it for their lives. On the other side of me, detached, empty, quite alone, stood the saloon which brought me from Halfa. It was going back again to-night, and then I should be quite loose and outcast in the smiling Sudan.

I sat and meditated on the full significance of the

simple military phrase, "line of communications." It is the great discovery of the Sirdar that he has recognised that in the Sudan the communications are the essence and heart of the whole problem. And now I recognised it too.

It was a long, long story already. I was now just at the threshold of what was regarded officially as the difficult part of the 1150 odd miles between Cairo and the front; I was still seventy miles or so from Berber —and my problem, instead of just beginning, appeared just on the point of an abrupt and humiliating finish. The original question was how I was to get myself and my belongings to the front; the threatened solution was that I should get there, if at all, on my feet, and that my belongings would serve to blaze the track for anybody desperate enough to follow.

I am not an old campaigner. The old campaigner, as you know, starts out with the clothes he stands up in and a tin-opener. The young campaigner provides the change of linen and tins for the old campaigner to open. So in Cairo I bought everything I could think of as likely to palliate a summer in the Sudan. I wore out my patience and my legs a whole week in drapers' shops, and saddlers' shops, and apothecaries' shops, and tobacconists' shops, and tin-and-bottle shops, and general shops. I bought two horses and two nigger boys—one to look after the horses and one to look after me. One of them I bought through Cook, as one takes a railway-ticket;

the other suddenly dashed at me in the street with a bundle of testimonials unanimously stating that he could cook more or less, and clean things if he were shown how. Both wore tarbushes and striped nightgowns, and nothing else visible, which was natural; though afterwards they emerged in all kinds of gorgeousness. What was inconvenient was that they neither of them understood any language I could talk, that they both had the same name, and that I could not for the life of me remember what it was. However, one was black with red eyes, and the other yellow with white; and it was something to know them apart. The black-and-red one originally alleged that he could talk English. It was true that he could understand a dozen words of that lingo if pronounced sloppily enough and put ungrammatically together. But when it came to his turn he could say "Yes, sir," and then followed it up with an inarticulate burble more like the sound of a distant railway train than any known form of human speech.

Anyhow, I started. I started with the properties above named and six packages besides. Some went with me on the tourist boat; others went by rail or post boat, or Government barge, to await me; others stayed behind to follow me. I got to Assuan, and there a new trial awaited me. I had no camels, and it would be absurd to go to the Sudan without camels. Now I knew nothing at all of the points of a camel, nor of its market price, nor what it eats, nor could I

ride it. However, camels had to be bought, and I borrowed an interpreter, and went out to the Bisharin village outside Assuan and bought some. The interpreter said he knew all about camels, and that they were worth £27 a pair.

First, though, they had to be tried. The Bisharin were all standing about grouped round little heaps of dry, cracked mud, which it took a moment's consideration to recognise as their houses. Their costume consisted mainly of their hair—in little tight plaits tumbling every way over their heads; they have it done thus in infancy, and never take it out of curl: it looks like the inside hair of a horse's tail, where the brush can't get at it. They all talked at the same time, and gesticulated furiously.

The first Bishari was a wizened old man, with a wisp or two of grey beard, a black shawl, and a large expanse of chest, back, arm, and leg, of a delicate plum-colour. With horrible noises he pulled his camel down on to its knees. The camel made still more horrible noises; it growled, and screeched, and snarled, and brayed, and gurgled out big pink bladders from its inside. Then the old man tied a pad of sackcloth on to the beast's hump by way of saddle, seized the halter, and leaped on sideways; the camel unfolded its legs joint by joint and leaped forward. The old man whacked with a will, the camel bounded up and down, the old man bounced in his saddle like an india-rubber ball, his shawl

flapped out like wings, till all his body was native plum-colour. Then, suddenly, the camel gathered itself together and soared aloft—and the next thing was the old man flying up to heaven, slowly turning over, and slowly, then quickly, thudding to earth. Everybody roared with laughter, including the victim; red was flowing fast over the plum-colour arm, but he didn't notice it. I bought that camel on the spot—to carry five hundredweight of baggage, not me.

There was one other cropper before the trials were over, and two of the camels cantered and galloped round the mud warren in a way that made me tremble. However, I trusted to luck against the time when I might have to ride any of them, and bought with a light heart. I also bought two camel-men—a black, apparently answering to the name of Jujube, and a yellow, who asserted he was my groom's brother. The latter produced, with great pride, a written testimonial: it was from a British officer, to the effect that he had discharged the bearer, and would the Director of Transport kindly send him home. But I chanced that too; and now, with the exception of the few necessaries that were following me—and presumably are still—I was ready to march on Khartum.

And now came in the question of the lines of communication. I went to the commandant of Assuan; could he kindly send up my horses by steamer? Yes, certainly, when there was a steamer to send them by.

But steamers were few and much in request for railway stores and supplies. It was a question of waiting till there should appear military horses to go up river. Mine must go and stand in the camp meanwhile. Hurrah! said I; never mind about a few days: that was one load off my mind. So I hauled the horses out of the stable, and gave the syce some money, and a letter to say who he was, and peacefully left him to shift.

Camels, being straggling and unportable beasts, could not go by boat; so I gave their attendants also money, and told them to walk to Halfa. Then I went to Halfa myself, and waited.

At Halfa, knowing its name so well, I had expected to find a hotel. So there was one—the "Hotel des Voyageurs"—staring the landing-stage in the face. But it was a Greek hostelry, very small, a mile from the military post of Halfa, and at this stage I had a mind above Greek hotels. So I went to Walker & Co., the universal provider of Halfa. There was no immediate accommodation for correspondents. So I pitched my tent a little disconsolately in the compound, and sat down to wait until there was. Presently there was a room, and in that I sat down to wait for the camels. One day their attendant grinned in, and shook hands with me; the camels were accommodated with a bunk apiece in the garden, and I sat down again to wait for the horses. I waited many days and then wired; the commandant wired

back, "Your horses cannot go by steamer at present." When was "at present" going to end? So next I wired to Cook's agent to send them by road; he replied that they had started four days before. So far, so good. I sat down to wait some more.

Only two days before they might be expected, on March 1, came the news that the British brigade had gone up to Berber, and that correspondents might go too.

Hurrah again! Only when, how? O, you can go to-morrow in the saloon, of course, to rail-head. And beyond? Well, beyond you must take your chance. Can camels go by train? It was hardly likely. Horses? Not at present—and—well—you had better go very light.

Clearly everything that was mine must take its chance too. I started the camels to walk across the desert—two hundred and thirty-four miles from Nile to Nile again—and told them to be quick about it. Of course they could never have done it, but that the traffic-manager kindly gave them authority to drink some of the engines' water on the way. I left orders to the horses to do the same; left all my heaviest goods lying about on the bank of the Nile; definitely gave up all hope of the things that were supposed to be coming up after me; started, and arrived in the early morning of March 3.

Now came the time to take my chance. And here, sure enough, comes a chocolate Arab, with the in-

formation that he has any number of camels to let. The chance has turned out a good one, after all. But then comes along a fair Englishman, on a shaggy grey pony; I was told he was the Director of Transport. That's all right; I'll ask his advice. Only, before I could speak, he suavely drew the attention of correspondents to the rule that any Arab hiring camels already hired by the army was liable to two years imprisonment. The news was not encouraging; and of course the Arabs swore that the army had not hired the best camels at all. I believed it at the time, but came to know the Arab better afterwards. Anyhow here I sat, amid the dregs of my vanishing household, seventy miles from Berber—no rail, no steamer, no horse, no camel. Only donkeys, not to be thought of—and, by George, legs! I never thought of them, but I've got 'em, and why not use 'em. I'll walk.

V.

I MARCH TO BERBER.

THE donkeys had been hired, at war prices, about ten in the morning, delivery promised within an hour. At three in the afternoon two of us sweated over from the rail-head to the village, to try and hurry them up. Fifteen had been ordered; five were nearly ready. The sheikh swore by Allah that all should be ready within an hour. At five we went over again. There were only four by now; the sheikh swore by Allah that the others should be ready within an hour.

On that we began to threaten violence; whereupon round a mud-wall corner trotted eighteen donkeys, followed by eight black men and a boy. Twenty-two! It was late, but it was better than could be expected of any Arab. We kept them sedulously in our eye till we had them alongside the mountainous confusion of three correspondents' light baggage. Arrived at the scene of action, they sat down with one consent and looked at it.

The only way to hurry an Arab is to kill him, after which he is useless as a donkey-driver; so we sat down too, and had some tea, and looked at them. Presently they made it known that they had no rope. A rope was produced and cut into lengths; each took one, and sat and looked at it. Finally arose an old, old man, attired in a rag round his head and a pair of drawers: with the eye of experience he selected the two lightest articles, and slowly tied them together. Example works wonders. There was almost a rush to secure the next smallest load, and in ten minutes everything was tied together and slung across the little pack-saddles, except one load. This they looked at for a good long time, reluctant to get a piece of work finished; at last they felt justified in loading this on also.

We were ready: we were actually about to start. Gratitude and wonder filled my soul.

Three men, nine Arabs, nine more to see them off, twenty-two donkeys—and, Heaven forgive me, I had almost forgotten the horse. That is to say, his owner applied to him an Arab word which I understood to mean horse—plural before he was produced, singular when it was no longer possible to allege that there was more than one of him. Experts opined that he might in the remote past have been a dervish horse—a variation from the original type, produced by never feeding the animal. His teeth, what remained of them, gave no clear evidence of his age, but on a

general view of him I should say he was rising ninety. Early in the century he was probably chestnut, but now he was partly a silver chestnut and partly presented no impression of colour at all: he was just faded. He wore a pessimistic expression, a coat about an inch and a quarter long an open saddle sore, and no flesh of any kind in any corner. We offered him fodder—something like poor pea-halm and something like string, only less nutritious. He looked at it wearily, smelt it, and turned in perplexity to his master as if asking instructions. He had forgotten what food was for.

The young moon was climbing up the sky when we set off. With chattering and yells the donkeys and Arabs streamed out on to the desert track. The first load came undone in the first five minutes, and every one had to be readjusted in the first hour. The Arab, you see, has only been working with donkeys for ten thousand years or so, and you can't expect him to have learned much about it yet. But we kept them going. I was rearguard officer, with five Arabic words, expressing "Get on" in various degrees of emphasis, and a hunting-crop.

We only marched three hours to camp that night, but by the time we off-loaded in a ring of palms, with the Nile swishing below and the wind swishing overhead, we had earned our dinner and some sleep: had we not induced Arabs to start? And now came in one of the conveniences—so far the only one—of

travelling in the Sudan. "Three angarebs," said the correspondent of experience; and back came the servants presently with three of the stout wooden frames lashed across with thongs that form the Sudan bed: you can get them anywhere there is a village—as a rule, to be sure, there is none—and they are luxurious beyond springs and feathers.

At half-past one I opened my eyes and saw the moon stooping down to meet the fringe of palm leaves. The man of experience sat up on his angareb and cried "Awake." They did awake: three hours' sleep is not long enough to make you sleepy. We loaded up by the last moonlight, and took the road again. For nearly three hours the rustling on our right and the line of palms showed that we kept to the Nile bank; then at five we halted to water the donkeys—they eat when they can and what they can—and started for a long spell across the desert. Grey dawn showed us a gentle swell of stony sand, hard under foot; freshness came with it to man and beast, and we struck forward briskly.

When the sun came up on us, I saw the caravan for the first time plainly; and I was very glad we were not likely to meet anybody I knew. My kit looked respectable enough in the train, and in Berber it went some way to the respectable furnishing of a house. But as piled by Sudanese Arabs on to donkeys it was disreputable, dishevelled, a humiliation beyond blushes. The canteen, the chair and table that had

looked so neat and workmanlike, on the donkey became the pots and sticks of a gipsy encampment. My tent was a slipshod monstrosity, my dressing-case blatantly secondhand, my washing basin was positively indecent. To make things worse, they had trimmed my baggage up with garbage of their own —dirty bags of dates and cast-off clothing. They mostly insisted on riding the smallest and heaviest-laden donkeys themselves, jumping at a bound on to the jogging load of baggage with four legs pattering underneath, and had to be flogged off again. And to finish my shame, here was I trudging behind, cracking and flicking at donkeys and half-naked black men, like a combination of gipsy, horse-coper, and slave-driver.

But we travelled. Some of the donkeys were hardly bigger than collies, and their drivers did all that laziness and ineptitude could suggest to keep them back; but we travelled. It came to my turn of the horse about half-past six or so: certainly he was not a beast to make comparisons on, but the donkeys left him behind unless you made him trot, which was obviously cruel. I should say they kept up four miles an hour with a little driving.

We gave ourselves an hour at eight for breakfast, and the end of the march was in soft sand under a cruel sun. It was not till nearly one that the camel thorn—all stalk and prickles, no leaves—gave way to palms again, and again we looked down on the

Nile. A single palm gives almost as much shade as an umbrella with the silk off, but we found four together, and a breeze from the river, and a drink—O that first drink in a Sudan camp!—and lunch and a sleep, and a tub and tea, and we reflected on our ten hours' march and were happy. At five we joggled off again.

We lost the place we had intended to camp at, and the desert began to get rugged and to produce itself ever so far both ways, like the parallel lines in Euclid, and we never got any farther forward on it. It got to be a kind of treadmill—we going on and the desert going back under us. But at last we did get to a place—didn't know its name, nor cared—and went to sleep a little more. And in the pale morning by happy luck we found two camels, and two of us trotted joyously forward past swimming mirages and an endless string of ruined mud villages into mud Berber. The donkeys were not much behind either: they did about seventy miles in forty-two hours. But I am afraid it must have been the death of the horse, and I am sorry. It seems a cruelty to kill him just as he was beginning to be immortal.

VI.

THE SIRDAR.

Major-General Sir Horatio Herbert Kitchener is forty-eight years old by the book; but that is irrelevant. He stands several inches over six feet, straight as a lance, and looks out imperiously above most men's heads; his motions are deliberate and strong; slender but firmly knit, he seems built for tireless, steel-wire endurance rather than for power or agility: that also is irrelevant. Steady passionless eyes shaded by decisive brows, brick-red rather full cheeks, a long moustache beneath which you divine an immovable mouth; his face is harsh, and neither appeals for affection nor stirs dislike. All this is irrelevant too: neither age, nor figure, nor face, nor any accident of person, has any bearing on the essential Sirdar. You could imagine the character just the same as if all the externals were different. He has no age but the prime of life, no body but one to carry his mind, no face but one to keep his brain behind. The brain and the will are the essence and the whole of the man—a

brain and a will so perfect in their workings that, in the face of extremest difficulty, they never seem to know what struggle is. You cannot imagine the Sirdar otherwise than as seeing the right thing to do and doing it. His precision is so inhumanly unerring, he is more like a machine than a man. You feel that he ought to be patented and shown with pride at the Paris International Exhibition. British Empire: Exhibit No. I., *hors concours*, the Sudan Machine.

It was aptly said of him by one who had closely watched him in his office, and in the field, and at mess, that he is the sort of feller that ought to be made manager of the Army and Navy Stores. The aphorist's tastes lay perhaps in the direction of those more genial virtues which the Sirdar does not possess, yet the judgment summed him up perfectly. He would be a splendid manager of the Army and Navy Stores. There are some who nurse a desperate hope that he may some day be appointed to sweep out the War Office. He would be a splendid manager of the War Office. He would be a splendid manager of anything.

But it so happens that he has turned himself to the management of war in the Sudan, and he is the complete and the only master of that art. Beginning life in the Royal Engineers—a soil reputed more favourable to machinery than to human nature—he early turned to the study of the Levant. He was one of Beaconsfield's military vice-consuls in Asia Minor; he

was subsequently director of the Palestine Exploration Fund. At the beginning of the Sudan troubles he appeared. He was one of the original twenty-five officers who set to work on the new Egyptian army. And in Egypt and the Sudan he has been ever since—on the staff generally, in the field constantly, alone with natives often, mastering the problem of the Sudan always. The ripe harvest of fifteen years is that he knows everything that is to be learned of his subject. He has seen and profited by the errors of others as by their successes. He has inherited the wisdom and the achievements of his predecessors. He came at the right hour, and he was the right man.

Captain R.E., he began in the Egyptian army as second-in-command of a regiment of cavalry. In Wolseley's campaign he was Intelligence Officer. During the summer of 1884 he was at Korosko, negotiating with the Ababdeh sheiks in view of an advance across the desert to Abu Hamed; and note how characteristically he has now bettered the then abandoned project by going that way to Berber and Khartum himself—only with a railway! The idea of the advance across the desert he took over from Lord Wolseley, and indeed from immemorial Arab caravans; and then, for his own stroke of insight and resolution amounting to genius, he turned a raid into an irresistible certain conquest, by superseding camels with the railway. Others had thought of the desert route: the Sirdar, correcting Korosko to Halfa, used

it. Others had projected desert railways: the Sirdar made one. That, summarised in one instance, is the working of the Sudan machine.

As Intelligence Officer Kitchener accompanied Sir Herbert Stewart's desert column, and you may be sure that the utter breakdown of transport which must in any case have marred that heroic folly was not unnoticed by him. Afterwards, through the long decade of little fights that made the Egyptian army, Kitchener was fully employed. In 1887 and 1888 he commanded at Suakim, and it is remarkable that his most important enterprise was half a failure. He attacked Osman Digna at Handub, when most of the Emir's men were away raiding; and although he succeeded in releasing a number of captives, he thought it well to retire, himself wounded in the face by a bullet, without any decisive success. The withdrawal was in no way discreditable, for his force was a jumble of irregulars and levies without discipline. But it is not perhaps fanciful to believe that the Sirdar, who has never given battle without making certain of an annihilating victory, has not forgotten his experience of haphazard Bashi-Bazouking at Handub.

He had his revenge before the end of 1888, when he led a brigade of Sudanese over Osman's trenches at Gemaizeh. Next year at Toski he again commanded a brigade. In 1890 he succeeded Sir Francis Grenfell as Sirdar. That he meant to be Sirdar in fact as

well as name he showed in 1894. The young Khedive travelled south to the frontier, and took the occasion to insult every British officer he came across. Kitchener promptly gave battle: he resigned, a crisis came, and the Khedive was obliged to do public penance by issuing a General Order in praise of the discipline of the army and of its British officers. Two years later he began the reconquest of the Sudan. Without a single throw-back the work has gone forward since—but not without intervals. The Sirdar is never in a hurry. With immovable self-control he holds back from each step till the ground is consolidated under the last. The real fighting power of the Sudan lies in the country itself—in its barrenness which refuses food, and its vastness which paralyses transport. The Sudan machine obviates barrenness and vastness: the bayonet action stands still until the railway action has piled the camp with supplies or the steamer action can run with a full Nile. Fighting men may chafe and go down with typhoid and cholera: they are in the iron grip of the machine, and they must wait the turn of its wheels. Dervishes wait and wonder, passing from apprehension to security. The Turks are not coming; the Turks are afraid. Then suddenly at daybreak one morning they see the Sirdar advancing upon them from all sides together, and by noon they are dead. Patient and swift, certain and relentless, the Sudan machine rolls conquering southward.

In the meantime, during all the years of preparation and achievement, the man has disappeared. The man Herbert Kitchener owns the affection of private friends in England and of old comrades of fifteen years' standing; for the rest of the world there is no man Herbert Kitchener, but only the Sirdar, neither asking affection nor giving it. His officers and men are wheels in the machine: he feeds them enough to make them efficient, and works them as mercilessly as he works himself. He will have no married officers in his army — marriage interferes with work. Any officer who breaks down from the climate goes on sick leave once: next time he goes, and the Egyptian army bears him on its strength no more. Asked once why he did not let his officers come down to Cairo during the season he replied, "If it were to go home, where they would get fit and I could get more work out of them, I would. But why should I let them down to Cairo?" It is unamiable, but it is war, and it has a severe magnificence. And if you suppose, therefore, that the Sirdar is unpopular, he is not. No general is unpopular who always beats the enemy. When the columns move out of camp in the evening to march all night through the dark, they know not whither, and fight at dawn with an enemy they have never seen, every man goes forth with a tranquil mind. He may personally come back and he may not; but about the general result there is not a doubt. You bet your boots the Sirdar knows: he

wouldn't fight if he weren't going to win. Other generals have been better loved; none was ever better trusted.

For of one human weakness the Sirdar is believed not to have purged himself — ambition. He is on his promotion, a man who cannot afford to make a mistake. Homilies against ambition may be left to those who have failed in their own: the Sirdar's, if apparently purely personal, is legitimate and even lofty. He has attained eminent distinction at an exceptionally early age: he has commanded victorious armies at an age when most men are hoping to command regiments. Even now a junior Major-General, he has been intrusted with an army of six brigades, a command such as few of his seniors have ever led in the field. Finally, he has been charged with a mission such as almost every one of them would have greedily accepted,—the crowning triumph of half a generation's war. Naturally he has awakened jealousies, and he has bought permission to take each step on the way only by brilliant success in the last. If in this case he be not so stiffly unbending to the high as he is to the low, who shall blame him? He has climbed too high not to take every precaution against a fall.

But he will not fall, just yet at any rate. So far as Egypt is concerned he is the man of destiny—the man who has been preparing himself sixteen years for one great purpose. For Anglo-Egypt he is the

Mahdi, the expected; the man who has sifted experience and corrected error; who has worked at small things and waited for great; marble to sit still and fire to smite; steadfast, cold, and inflexible; the man who has cut out his human heart and made himself a machine to retake Khartum.

VII

ARMS AND MEN.

The campaign of 1897, which opened with General Hunter's advance from Merawi on Abu Hamed, ended with the occupation of the Nile valley as far as Ed Damer, seven miles beyond the junction of that river and the Atbara. At the beginning of March, when I reached the front, the advanced post had been withdrawn from Ed Damer, which had been destroyed, and established at Fort Atbara in the northern angle of the two rivers. Between that point and Berber, twenty-three miles north, was stationed the army with which it was proposed to meet the threatened attack of Osman Digna and Mahmud.

It was not possible to use the whole force at the Sirdar's disposition for that purpose. The Anglo-Egyptian strategical position was roughly a semicircle, with Omdurman and Khartum for a centre, so that the Khalifa held the advantage of the interior. The westward horn of the semicircle was the

garrisons of Dongola, Korti, and Merawi; the eastward that of Kassala. In advance of the regular garrisons, friendly Arabs held a fan-shaped series of intelligence posts in the Bayuda desert, and at Adarama, Gos Redjeb and El Fasher on the upper reaches of the Atbara. The Dervishes maintained one desert post at Gebra to the north-west of Omdurman, and one to the north-east at Abu Delek. But hemmed in as they were, they had the manifest advantage that they could always strike at the newly recovered province of Dongola by the various routes across the Bayuda desert. So that Korti and Merawi had to be garrisoned, as well as Kassala.

The garrisons, though they never so much as saw the enemy, played, nevertheless, an indispensable part in the Atbara campaign. The infantry of the force immediately under the Sirdar's eye was divided into four brigades—three Egyptian, one British. The division of the Egyptian army, counting three brigades, was under the command of Major-General Archibald Hunter.

If the Sirdar is the brain of the Egyptian army, General Hunter is its sword-arm. First and above everything, he is a fighter. For fourteen years he has been in the front of all the fighting on the Southern border. He was Intelligence Officer during the anxious days before Ginnis, when the Camerons and 9th Sudanese were beset by triumphant dervishes in Kosheh fort, and reinforce-

ments were far to the northward. Going out on a sortie one day, he lingered behind the retiring force to pick off dervishes with a rifle he was wont to carry on such occasions: there he received a wound in the shoulder, which he is not quit of to-day. When Nejumi came down in '89, Hunter was in the front of everything: he fought all day at the head of the blacks at Argin, and commanded a brigade of them at Toski. Here he was again wounded — a spear-thrust in the arm while he was charging the thickest of the Dervishes at the head of the 13th. Thereafter he was Governor of the frontier at Halfa, Governor of the frontier at Dongola, Governor of the frontier at Berber—always on the frontier. When there was fighting he always led the way to it with his blacks, whom he loves like children, and who love him like a father. Fourteen years of bugle and bullet by night and day, in summer and winter, fighting Dervishes, Dervishes year in and year out—till fighting Dervishes has come to be a holy mission, pursued with a burning zeal akin to fanaticism. Hunter Pasha is the crusader of the nineteenth century.

In all he is and does he is the true knight-errant —a paladin drifted into his wrong century. He is one of those happy men whom nature has made all in one piece—consistent, simple, unvarying; everything he does is just like him. He is short and thickset; but that, instead of making him unromantic, only

draws your eye to his long sword. From the feather in his helmet to the spurs on his heels, he is all energy and dancing triumph; every movement is vivacious, and he walks with his keen conquering hazel eye looking out and upward, like an eagle's. Sometimes you will see on his face a look of strain and tension, which tells of the wound he always carries with him. Then you will see him lolling under a palm-tree, while his staff are sitting on chairs; light-brown hair rumpled over his bare head, like a happy schoolboy. When I first saw him thus, being blind, I conceived him a subaltern, and offered opinions with indecorous freedom: he left the error to rebuke itself.

Reconnoitring almost alone up to the muzzles of the enemy's rifles, charging bare-headed and leading on his blacks, going without his rest to watch over the comfort of the wounded, he is always the same—always the same impossible hero of a book of chivalry. He is renowned as a brave man even among British officers: you know what that means. But he is much more than a tilting knight-errant; he is one of the finest leaders of troops in the army. Report has it that the Sirdar, knowing his worth, leaves the handling of the actual fighting largely to Hunter, and he never fails to plan and execute a masterly victory. A sound and brilliant general, you would say his one fault was his reckless daring; but that, too, in an army of semi-savages, is a necessary quality of generalship. Furthermore, they say he is

as good in an office as he is in action. Above all, he can stir and captivate and lead men. "General Archie" is the wonder and the darling of all the Egyptian army. And when the time comes that we want a new national hero, it may be he will be the wonder and the darling of all the Empire also.

The First Brigade of Hunter's division was still quartered in Berber. It consisted of the 9th Sudanese under Walter Bey, 10th Sudanese (Nason Bey), 11th Sudanese (Jackson Bey), and 2nd Egyptian (Pink Bey). The brigadier was Lieutenant-Colonel Hector Archibald Macdonald, one of the soundest soldiers in the Egyptian or British armies. He had seen more and more varied service than any man in the force. Promoted from the ranks after repeated and conspicuous acts of gallantry in the Afghan war, he was taken prisoner at Majuba Hill. He joined the Egyptian army in 1887, and commanded the 11th Sudanese at Gemaizeh, Toski, and Afafit. At Gemaizeh the 11th, ever anxious to be at the enemy, broke its formation; and it is said that Macdonald Bey, after exhausting Arabic and Hindustani, turned in despair to abusing them in broad Scots. Finally, he rode up and down in front of their rifles, and at last got them steady under a heavy fire from men who would far rather have killed themselves than him. In the campaigns of '96 and '97 he was intrusted with a brigade; he showed a rare gift for the handling of troops, and wherever the fighting was hardest there was his

brigade to be found. In person, "old Mac"—he is under fifty, but anything above forty is elderly in the Egyptian army—is of middle height, but very broad,—so sturdily built that you might imagine him to be armour-plated under his clothes. He walks and rides with a resolute solidity bespeaking more strength than agility. He has been known to have fever, but never to be unfit for duty.

The Second Brigade also consisted of three Sudanese battalions and one Egyptian — the 12th, 13th, and 14th Sudanese (Townshend, Collinson, and Shekleton Beys), and the 8th Egyptian under Kiloussi Bey, a soldierly old Turk who was through the Russo-Turkish war. Lieutenant-Colonel Maxwell commanded it—an officer who has served in the Egyptian army through all its successes; big, masterful, keen, and reputed an especially able military administrator, he is but just entering middle age, and ought to have a brilliant career before him. This brigade was quartered at Essillem, about half-way between Berber and the Atbara.

At the Atbara was Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis with an all-Egyptian brigade — the 3rd, 4th, and 15th, under Sillem, Sparkes, and Hickman Beys, and the 7th under Fathy Bey, a big, smiling Egyptian of great energy and ability, a standing contradiction of the theory that a native Egyptian can never make a smart officer. The brigadier is one of the most popular officers in this or any other army. Colonel

Lewis's talents and abounding vitality would have led him to distinction in any career. From the fact that he is affectionately known as "Taffy," it may be deduced that he is in whole or part a Welshman—certainly he is richly dowered with the vivacity, the energy, and the quickness of uptake of the Celt. He treats his staff and subordinates like younger brothers, and discipline never suffers. I have heard him say that he is always talking, but he is also always very much worth listening to. Finally, I once went into a store in Berber and proposed to buy tinned Brussels sprouts. "But are they fit to eat?" I asked, in sudden doubt. "Oh yes, sir," cried the unshaven Greek, with enthusiasm; "Lewis Bey likes them very much."

Taking the strength of a battalion at 700 rifles, each infantry brigade would number 2800 men. To these we must add the cavalry under Lieutenant-Colonel Broadwood, a rapid, adroit, and daring leader: long-legged, light, built for a horseman, never tired, never more than half asleep, never surprised, never flurried, never slow, he is the ideal of a cavalry general. The Egyptian trooper is a being entirely unlike anything else in the world. What miracles of patience and tact, toil and daring, have been devoted to him will never be known; for the men who did it will not tell. The eight squadrons, with galloping Maxims, were at this time divided between the three Egyptian camps. So were five

batteries of artillery, the command of which was with Lieutenant-Colonel Long—slow of speech, veiling a passionate tenderness for guns and a deadly knowledge of everything pertaining to them. Finally, there were two companies of camel corps with the Third Brigade. The whole strength of the Egyptian force would thus fall not very far short of 10,000 men, with 46 guns. Operating from Port Atbara were also three gunboats.

One mile north of the Second Brigade, Major-General Gatacre's British were encamped at Debeika. At this time it had only three battalions—the 1st Lincolnshire (10th) under Colonel Verner, 1st Cameron Highlanders (79th) under Colonel Money, and 1st Warwickshire (6th) under Lieutenant-Colonel Quayle-Jones. The 1st Seaforth Highlanders (72nd: Colonel Murray) were under orders, as we heard, to come up and complete the brigade. Besides the infantry, there was a battery of Maxims under Major Hunter-Blair. The brigade was as fine a one as you could well pick out of the army, whether for shooting, average of service, or strength. Two companies of the Warwicks had been sent, to their despair, to Merawi; but even so the strength of the brigade must have been over 2500.

General Gatacre came up with a great reputation, which he seized every occasion to increase. His one overmastering quality is tireless, abounding, almost superhuman energy. From the moment he is first

out of his hut at reveille to the time when he goes nodding from mess to bed at nine, he seems possessed by a demon that whips him ever into activity. Of middle height and lightly built, his body is all steel wire. As a man he radiates a gentle, serious courtesy. As a general, if he has a fault it lies on the side of not leaving enough to his subordinates. Restless brain and body will ever be at something new—working out a formation, riding hours across country looking for a camp, devising means to get through a zariba, personally superintending the making of a road, addressing the men after church parade every Sunday. In the ranks they call him "General Back-acher," and love him. "He *is* the soldier's general," I have heard rapturous Tommy exclaim, when the brigadier has been satisfying himself in person that nobody wanted for what could be obtained. Later on in the campaign some thought he drove his officers and men a little hard. But whatever he asked of them in labour and discomfort he was always ready to double and treble for himself.

This, then, was the Sirdar's command—a total of 12,000 to 13,000 men, with 52 guns. The Seaforths might be expected to add about 1000 more. All numbers, I should here remark, are based on the roughest estimates, as, by the Sirdar's wish, they were never stated publicly. In any case, there was not much doubt that the force was sufficient to account hand-

somely for anything that was likely to come against it. Whether the dervishes were even coming at all was not at this time very certain. It was known that Mahmud had taken over his force from Metemmeh, which had hitherto been his head-quarters, to join Osman Digna at Shendi on the eastern bank. That was evidence that the attack, if it was coming, would fall on us rather than the Merawi side. Osman's men, it was further reported, had begun to drift northward in detachments; though whether this meant business or not it was hard to say. It seemed difficult to believe that they had let Berber alone last autumn and winter when it was weakly garrisoned, only to attack now, when attack must mean annihilation. But you must remember the peculiarities of Arab information. The ordinary Arab spy is as incurious about figures as the Sirdar himself could desire; "few" and "very few," "many" and "very many," are his nearest guesses at a total. It was not at all certain that Mahmud and Osman, though they probably knew that reinforcements had come up, had the vaguest idea of the real strength of the force.

Finally, said those who remembered, this was just like Toski over again. Whispers and whispers for months that the horde was coming; disappointment and disappointment; and then, just when doubt was becoming security and the attempt madness, a head-

long rush upon inevitable destruction. Such follies issue from the very nature of the Mahdist polity —a jealous ill-informed despot safe at Omdurman and ill-supplied Emirs apprehensive at the front Therefore we hoped for the best. What their force might be, of course we knew hardly better than they knew ours. It might be 10,000, or 15,000, or 20,000.

If they came they would fight: that was certain. How they would fight we knew not. It depended on Mahmud. Osman Digna has become a commonplace of Sudanese warfare—a man who has never shown himself eminent either for personal courage or for generalship, yet obviously a man of great ability, since by evasive cunning and dogged persistence he has given us more trouble than all the other Emirs together. His own tribe, the Hadendowa, the most furious warriors of Africa, are long since reconciled with the Government, and have resumed their old trade of caravan-leading. That Osman struggles on might fancifully be traced to his strain of Turkish blood, contributing a steadfastness of purpose seldom found in the out-and-out barbarian. He has become a fat old toad now, they say, and always leaves fights at an early stage for private prayer; yet he is still as much alive as when he threw up a position on the Suakim County Council to join the Expected Mahdi, and

you cannot but half admire the rascal's persistence in his evil ways.

Had Osman been in command, he doubtless knew too much to risk a general engagement. But it seemed that the direction of things lay mainly with Mahmud. And of Mahmud, but for the facts that he was a social favourite in Omdurman, was comparatively young, and had wiped out the Jaalin for the Khalifa, nobody — except probably Colonel Wingate — knew anything at all.

Whatever there was to know, Colonel Wingate surely knew it, for he makes it his business to know everything. He is the type of the learned soldier, in which perhaps our army is not so strong as it is on other sides. If he had not chosen to be Chief of the Intelligence Department of the Egyptian Army, he might have been Professor of Oriental Languages at Oxford. He will learn you any language you like to name in three months. As for that mysterious child of lies, the Arab, Colonel Wingate can converse with him for hours, and at the end know not only how much truth he has told, but exactly what truth he has suppressed. He is the intellectual, as the Sirdar is the practical, compendium of British dealings with the Sudan. With that he is himself the most practical of men, and few realise how largely it is due to the system of native intelligence he has organised, that operations in the Sudan are now certain and unsurprised instead of vague, as they once were. Nothing

is hid from Colonel Wingate, whether in Cairo or at the Court of Menelik, or on the shores of Lake Chad. As a press censor he has only one fault. He is so indispensable to the Sirdar that you can seldom get speech of him. His rise in the army has been almost startlingly rapid; yet there is not a man in it but, so far from envying, rejoices in a success earned by rare gifts and unstinted labour, and borne with an inviolable modesty.

VIII.

IN THE BRITISH CAMP.

Beyond doubt it was a great march. If only there had been a fight immediately at the farther end of it, it would have gone down as one of the great forced-marches of history.

News came to Abu Dis of Mahmud and Osman Digna's advance on a Friday afternoon, February 25; the men were just back from a sixteen-mile, seven-and-a-half-hour route-march in the desert. By eight next morning the last detachment had been conveyed by train to rail-head, which had been moved on past their camp to Surek; by ten at night the brigade was on the march. They marched all night; in the early morning came a telegram bidding them hasten, and they marched on under the Sudan sun into the afternoon. A short halt, and at three on Monday morning they were off again. At ten that night they got into Geneineteh, and were out again by three next morning. Six hours' march, seven hours' halt, eight hours' march again, and they were

close to Berber. And there they learned that the Dervishes had after all not arrived. A halt of twenty-four hours outside Berber rather damaged the record; but that was better than damaging the troops. Not but that they were quite ready to go on; it was by the Sirdar that the halt was ordered. They reached Berber—cheering blacks lining two miles of road, and massed bands playing the Cameron men, and the Lincolnshire poacher, and Warwickshire lads, and especially a good breakfast for everybody — and marched through to their camp ten miles beyond.

They started out on Saturday night, February 26; they reached camp on Thursday evening, March 3. Altogether they made 118 miles within five days—four, if you leave out the day's halt—or 134 in five and a half, if you also add the route-march; continuously they did 98 miles within three days.

That is marching. Furthermore, it was marching under nearly all conditions that make marching a weariness. In India troops on the march have a host of camp-followers to do the hard and disagreeable work. Of course, you and I could easily walk twenty-five miles a day for as long as anybody liked to name. But how would you like to try it with kit and rifle and a hundred rounds of ammunition? Also, when you did halt, how would you like to have to set to work getting wood to make your fire and water to cook your dinner? How would you like to march with baggage-camels, so slow that they poach all your

sleep? Especially, how would you like to be a cook —to come in tired and sweating, hungry and thirsty, and then stand out in the sun preparing dinner for your comrades? On the first three days' march some of the cooks got no more than four hours' sleep, and had to be relieved lest they dropped at their posts; few of the officers got more. Plenty of men went to sleep while marching; others dropped with weariness and vigil, like a boxer knocked stupid in a fight. One subaltern, being with baggage in the rear-guard, fell off his camel without noticing it, and went on peacefully slumbering in the sand. He woke up some time in the dead of night, and of course had not the vaguest idea where the army had gone to or in which direction he ought to follow it. He had hung his helmet and belts on the camel, which of course had gone on composedly, only glad to get rid of him. He was picked up by a man who was looking for somebody else.

A gunner in the Maxim battery had a worse time. He too dropped asleep, and woke up to find himself alone. He found himself near the river, and went on to overtake the force. Only unluckily—so magnificently unreasoning can the British soldier sometimes be — he followed down the stream instead of up. On top of that, he conceived an idea that he was in the enemy's country, with prowling dervishes ambushed behind every mimosa bush. So that while search parties quested for him by day, he carefully

hid himself, and at night pushed on again towards Cairo. It was several days before he was picked up.

All these are inevitable accompaniments of a forced march; what might have been avoided, and should have been, was the scandal that the men's boots gave out. True, the brigade had done a lot of marching since it came up-country, some of it—not much—over rock and loose sand. True, also, that the Sudan climate, destructive of all things, is particularly destructive of all things stitched. But the brigade had only been up-river about a month, after all, and no military boot ought to wear out in a month. We have been campaigning in the Sudan, off and on, for over fourteen years; we might have discovered the little peculiarities of its climate by now. The Egyptian army uses a riveted boot; the boots our British boys were expected to march in had not even a toe-cap. So that when the three battalions and a battery arrived in Berber hundreds of men were all but barefoot: the soles peeled off, and instead of a solid double sole, revealed a layer of shoddy packing sandwiched between two thin slices of leather. Not one man fell out sick; those who dropped asleep went on as soon as they came to, and overtook their regiments. But every available camel was burdened with a man who lacked nothing of strength or courage to march on—only boots. General Gatacre had half-a-dozen chargers; every one was carrying a bare-footed soldier, while

the general trudged with his men. All the mounted officers did the same.

It is always the same story—knavery and slackness clogging and strangling the best efforts of the British soldier. To save some contractor a few pence on a boot, or to save some War Office clerk a few hours of the work he is paid for not doing, you stand to lose a good rifle and bayonet in a decisive battle, and to break a good man's heart into the bargain. Is it worth it? But it is always happening; the history of the Army is a string of such disgraces. And each time we arise and bawl, "Somebody ought to be hanged." So says everybody. But nobody ever is hanged.[1]

[1] A certain stir followed the publication of these criticisms in England, penetrating as far as the House of Commons, and even the War Office. The official reply to them was in effect that the boots were very good boots, only that the work done by the brigade over bad ground had tried them too severely. It is a strange sort of answer to say that a military boot is a very good boot, only you mustn't march in it. Having walked myself over most of the same ground as General Gatacre's brigade, I am able to say that, while there is a good deal of rock and loose sand, the greater part of the going is hard sand or gravel. The boots I wore myself I have on at the moment of writing, as sound as ever.

It is possible that the War Office is right, and that for other purposes in other countries the boots supplied were very good boots. But in the Sudan, what with the drought and the fine cutting sand, everything in stitched leather goes to pieces with heart-breaking rapidity. It is to be presumed that our authorities could have discovered this fact: in the Egyptian army it is known perfectly well.

After Mr Powell Williams had more than once implied in the House that there was no foundation for the criticisms in the text,

That these men came so sturdily through the test stands to everybody's credit, but especially their brigadier's. From the day he took up his command General Gatacre set to work to make his men hard. Amazing stories floated down to Halfa, rebuking us with the stern simplicity of life at rail-head—no drink, perpetual marching, sleep every night in your boots. The general, we heard, had even avowed that he meant to teach his men to march twenty miles without water-bottles. He would merely halt them from time to time and water them—most wisely, since the soldier either swigs down all his water in the first hour, and is cooked for the rest of the day, or else, if he thinks he is in for a short march, pours the confounded thing out on the sand to lighten it. A most wise thing—if you can do it. For some of the old inhabitants of the Sudan shook their heads when they heard such tales. "He'll get 'em stale," said they; "wait till the hot weather; in this country you must make yourself comfortable." They were probably right—they knew; and for myself, I intended to give comfort the fullest possible trial. But so far the fact stood that the

Lord Lansdowne, in his speech announcing the proposed transmogrification of the Army Medical Services, gave away the War Office's case in the following terms: "The Egyptian campaign had brought to light one weak point which we could not afford to ignore. The Army boot, although a good boot, was apparently unsuited to resist the peculiar and insidious action of the desert sand. . . . He trusted they would be able to invent a boot which even General Gatacre and the desert sand would not be able to wear out." —('Daily Mail' Report, May 5.)

British had done their work brilliantly, and that their brigadier trained them to it.

When my camel padded into their camp by moonlight the day's work was done, and they were going to sleep. You came to the camp through a tangle of thick mimosa; a zariba of the same impossible thorns was heaped up all round it; the men were quartered along the river overlooking the foreshore. There was only time to be grateful for supper, and a blanket spread under the lee of a straw-plaited hut. Next thing I knew reveille was sounding, at a quarter past five. Directly on the sound stepped out the general—middle height, build for lightness and toughness together, elastic energy in the set of each limb, and in the keen, grave face a determined purpose to be equal to responsibility. He stayed to drink a cup of cocoa, and then mounted, and was away with his aide-de-camp; General Gatacre's aide-de-camp requires to be a hard man. When breakfast-time came the general was nowhere in camp, nor was he an hour later, nor an hour later still. He had just taken a little twenty-five mile scamper to look out a new site for his camp.

At reveille the camp had suddenly turned from dead to alive. You heard hoarse orders, and the ring of perpetual bugles. The dry air of the Sudan cracks the buglers' lips, as it does everybody else's; to keep them supple they were practising incessantly, so that the brigade is wrapped in bugling best part of the day. To-day it was also wrapped in something else.

It seemed to me that daylight was very long in coming—that lines of khaki figures seemed to pass to and fro in an unlifting mist. But that was only for the first few sleepy moments. As the north wind got up with the sun it soon became very plain what was the matter.

Dust! The camp was on land which had once been cultivated, black cotton land; and black cotton land when the wind blows is neither wholesome nor agreeable. It rose off the ground till the place was like London in a fog. On the horizon it lowered like thunder-clouds; close about you it whirled up like pepper when the lid of the castor comes off. You felt it, breathed it, smelt it, tasted it. It choked eyes and nose and ears, and you ground it between your teeth. After a few hours of it you forgot what being a man was like; you were merely clogging into a lump of Sudan.

It was a bad mistake to pitch on such a spot; and when you came to walk round the camp you saw how ill-equipped were the men to put up with it. Their heavy baggage—officers' and men's alike—had been left at rail-head; over 2500 men had come with 700 camels. The tents had arrived, but they were only just being unloaded from the steamer. The men were huddled under blankets stretched on four sticks; of the officers, some had tents, others sat in tiny elbow-squeezing tukls (huts of straw or rushes), such as the prophet Jonah would not have exchanged for his

gourd. There was hardly a shelter in the camp in which a man could stand upright. One or two good tukls had been built—wooden posts with beams lashed across them, and mats or coarse stems of halfa grass plaited between. But, taking the place as a whole, it was impossible to be comfortable, and especially impossible to be clean.

It was nobody's fault in particular, and in this good weather it did not particularly matter. It happened not to have begun stoking up at the time; when it likes it can be mid-summer in March. When it did begin, and especially if it came to a matter of summer quarters, such a camp as Debeika was an invitation to disease and death. You have to learn the Sudan's ways, they say, if you do not want the Sudan to eat you alive. The British brigade had to learn. Sure enough the Sirdar came to inspect it the day after, and on March 11 the brigade shifted camp to the empty and relatively clean village of Darmali, two miles higher up the river.

IX.

FORT ATBARA.

It needed only half a look at the Egyptian camp to convince you how much the British had to learn. The hospitable dinner-table was quite enough. In accordance with a detestable habit which I intend to correct in future, I arrived late for dinner: it was the fault of the camels, the camel-men, the servants, the guide, my companions, the country, and the weather. None the less kindly was I set down at table and ate of soup and fish, of ragout and fresh mutton and game, and was invited to drink hock, claret, champagne, whisky, gin, lime-juice, ginger-beer, Rosbach, and cognac, or any combination or permutation of the same. I was the guest of men who have been on the Sudan frontier for anything up to fifteen years, during which time they have learned the Sudan's ways and overcome its inhospitality.

As soon as everybody began to show signs of falling asleep at table—which hot days begun at four or five in the morning and worked hard through till half-past

seven soon lead you to consider the most natural phenomenon in the world—I went to bed under a roof. The owner of the tukl was up the river, off Shendi, on a gunboat. His house was palatially built with painted beams from the spoils of a raid on Metemmeh, and plaited with palm-leaf and halfa grass. Other officers preferred their tents; but the insides of these were sunk anything from one foot to four underground, the excavation neatly backed with dried Nile mud, so that a ten-foot tent became a lofty and airy apartment. The last thing I saw was a vast upstanding oblong tukl, which looked capable of holding a company. I was told it was the house of the mess-servants of one Egyptian battalion. It was more palatial than all the edifices in the British camp put together.

In the morning it was blowing a sand-storm, and Englishmen's eyes showed bloodshot through blue spectacles. It was gritty between the teeth, and to walk up wind spelt blindness; yet it was clean sand, and did not form soil in the mouth like the black dust of Debeika. In the early morning Fort Atbara appeared through the driving cloud as through smoked glass — a long walled camp, with its southern apex resting on the junction of Nile and Atbara. To find so strong a place in the lately won wilderness was a revelation, not of English energy, which is understood, but of Egyptian industry. The wall was over six feet high, firmly built of sun-dried mud; round it

had been a six-foot ditch, only the importunate sand had already half silted it up again. On the inside was a parapet, gun platforms with a couple of carefully clothed Maxims in each, a couple of guard-houses at the two main gates and a couple of blockhouses outside. Across the Atbara was a small fort; at the angle of the rivers a covered casemate gallery that would accommodate half a company precluded any attempt to turn the wall and attack from the foreshore. On the other side of the Nile was a smaller fort, walled and ditched likewise. In the inside straddled a crow's nest—built also with painted beams from Mahmud's house in Metemmeh—with a view that reached miles up both rivers. A couple of miles up the Atbara you could see dense mimosa thickets; so much of the bank as could get water has dropped back almost to virgin forest in the fourteen years of dervish devilry. But under the walls of Fort Atbara was neither mimosa nor Sodom apple nor any kind of scrub. Only a forest of stumps showed where the field of fire had been cleared—over a mile in every direction. Upright and regular among the stumps you could see a row of stakes; each marked a range of 100 yards up to 500: the Egyptian soldier was to hold his fire up to that and gain confidence by seeing his enemy go down. Best of all, the fort, though it dominated the country for miles, was itself hardly visible. From the ridge of the desert a mile away it was a few trees, the yardarms of a few sailing barges,

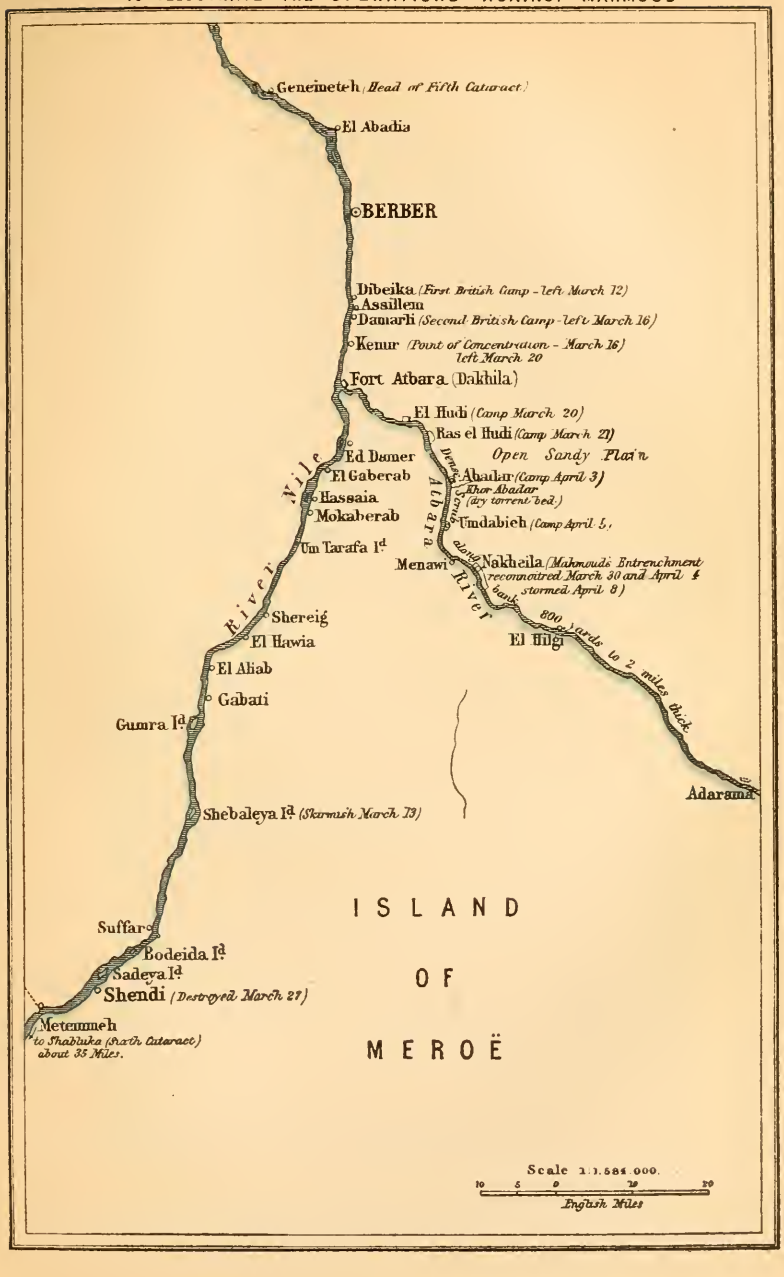
and a shelter trench. The whole dervish army might easily have been persuaded to run their heads on it; but they might have butted in vain against Fort Atbara till there was not one of them left standing.

The whole of this work had been made by the men who garrisoned it. There were none but Fellahin regiments in Fort Atbara; but the Egyptian soldier on fatigue duty is the finest soldier in the world. In a population of ten millions the conscription only asks for 20,000 men or so, and it can afford to pick and choose. In face the fellah soldier is a shade sullen, not to say blackguardly; in body he would be a joy to a sculptor. Shorter than the taller tribes of blacks, taller than the shorter, he is far better built all round. When he strips at bathing-time—for like all riverine peoples he is more clean than bashful—the bank is lined with studies for Hercules. And all the thews he has he puts into his work. Work is the fellah's idea of life, especially work with his native mud: the fatigue which other soldiers incline to resent as not part of their proper business he takes to most kindly of all his soldiering. Marching, digging, damming, brick-making, building, tree-felling—you can never find him unwilling nor leave him exhausted. He is the ideal soldier-of-all-work, true son of a country where human hand-labour has always beaten the machine.

The troops were housed either in post-and-straw tukls or in tents; but already a vast mud-brick

SKETCH MAP OF THE NILE AND ATBARA

TO ILLUSTRATE THE OPERATIONS AGAINST MAHMOUD



barrack stretched its skeleton across the camp. Along the foreshore the mud huts were hospital or officers' quarters or mess-houses. Already one big straw tukl was a *café*, where enterprising Greeks had set up a soda-water machine and instituted a *diner du jour*. And down on the beach the cluster of slim-sparred gyassas and the little street of box-and-mat built Greek shops marked the beginning of a town. As railway terminus, for this year at present, an American might almost call it the queen city of the Sudan. Only for the present it must be a city without native population; for the inhabitants of this reach are very few, and subsist on precarious subsidies paid them for protecting each other against the raids of the dervish.

Among the craft at the riverside the first you noticed was the gunboat. White, with tall black funnel amidships, deck above deck and platform topping platform, it looked more like a building than a warship. But for all their many storeys these gunboats draw only some two feet of water, while the loftiness of the gun-platforms enables them to search the highest bank at the lowest state of Nile. Ahead on the uppermost deck points the hungry muzzle of a gun; there are a couple more amidships, and a couple of Maxims on a dizzy shaking platform higher yet.

The war fleet at this time counted three stern-wheelers—the *Zafir* (Commander Keppel, R.N.), *Fatha*

(Lieutenant Beatty, R.N.), and *Nasa* (Lieutenant Hood, R.N.) Three more—the *Malik* (King), *Sultan*, and *Sheikh*—were down the river, waiting for their sections to be put together against high Nile. Fort Atbara was the Portsmouth of the Sudan: one of Captain Keppel's squadron always lay there, taking a week in its turn to rest and repair anything needful. The other two would be always up the river—one cruising off Shendi, and the other patrolling the seventy miles of river between. If necessary the boats could run past Shendi, forty miles more, to Shabluka, so that they acted as reconnoitring parties more than a hundred miles from the most advanced military post.

Naval operations have played a part in Sudan warfare ever since Gordon's time: was not "the Admiral" himself on Beresford's *Zafia* through those famous-infamous days which saw the tantalising tragedy of Khartum? Here, as elsewhere, the Sirdar has gathered up the experience of the past and brought it to full development. Everybody told him that he would never get the gunboats over the Fourth Cataract: a general who had been there in the Wolseley days delivered a lecture demonstrating unmercifully the mad impossibility of the scheme. A day or two after the Sirdar sent the boats over. To be sure one turned turtle in the attempt, and a naval lieutenant was fished out three-quarters drowned, and

two Egyptians had to be cut out through the bottom of the boat. Yet here were three vessels steaming up and down unperturbed, right under Mahmud's nose. The value of their services it would be quite impossible to exaggerate: they were worth all the rest of the Intelligence Department put together. From their reports it was known that the dervishes had crossed to Shendi and were coming down the river. Moreover, you may imagine that officers of her Majesty's navy did not confine their activity to looking on. A day or two before this Mahmud had been transferring his war material in barges from Metemmeh to Shendi. Knowing the ways of "the devils," as they amiably call the gunboats, he had entrenched a couple of hundred riflemen to cover the crossing. But one boat steamed cheerfully up to the bank and turned on the Maxims, while the other sunk one nuggar and captured two. A fourth lay in quite shallow water under the very muzzles of the dervish rifles. But on each boat are carried about half a company of Egyptian troops with a white officer. While the Maxims poppled away above them, the detachment—it was of the 15th Egyptians on this occasion—landed and cut out the nuggar before its owners' eyes. With men capable of such things as this about on the river, it was only by drilling a hole in the bottom of their boats and sinking them during the day that the dervishes could keep any craft to cross the river in at all.

The second day at Fort Atbara I stepped out after lunch, and there were two white sweltering gunboats instead of one. Everybody who had nothing else to do hurried as fast as the heat would let them down to the river. There the first thing they saw was an angareb being laboriously guided ashore by four native soldiers: on it lay a white man. He was a sergeant of marines, shot in the leg while directing the fire of the forward Maxim. "The devils have hit me," they said he cried out, with justly indignant surprise as he felt the bullet, then jumped to the gun and turned it himself on the quarter the shot came from. That was in the early morning; now he was very pale and a little limp, but smiling. Then came down the doctor hastily. "Didn't I say he wasn't to be brought ashore?" he said. "All right, sir," answered the wounded man, still resolutely smiling; "I expect I'm in for hospital anyhow." And away to hospital they bore him, for the boat would be up river again by dawn the next day.

Meantime the detachment of soldiers were stepping ashore with cheerful grins. It was easy to see how valuable was this gunboat work in giving the Egyptians confidence. True, they had lost one man wounded and had a few chips knocked off the stern-wheel; but had they not landed at Aliab—thirty miles from Fort Atbara—driven off the dervishes, and captured donkeys and loot? The loot was being

unladen at the moment—an angareb or two and odd garments, especially many bundles of rough riverside hay. "Take that up to my old horse," said the lieutenant in command, satisfaction in his tones. "Is there any polo this afternoon?"

It was hard to say whether this work best suited the young naval officer or the young naval officer best suited the work. Steaming up and down the river in command of a ship of his own, bombarding here, reconnoitring there, landing elsewhere for a brush with the dervishes, and then again a little way farther to pick up loot,—the work had all the charm of war and blockade-running and poaching combined. If a dervish shell did happen to smash the wheel where would the boat be, perhaps seventy miles from any help? It was said the Sirdar was a little nervous about them, and to my inexperience it was a perpetual wonder that the boats came back from every trip. But somehow, thanks to just a dash of caution in their audacity, they always did come back. Impudently daring in attack, with a happy eye to catch the latest moment for retreat, they were just the cutting-out heroes of one's youth come to life. They might have walked straight out of the 'Boy's Own Paper.'

Every returning boat brought fresh news of the advance. Dervishes at Aliab, even if not in force, could not but mean a movement towards attack. It was quite impossible to wear out the hospitality of

Fort Atbara, but duty began to wonder what the rest of the army was doing. So I recaptured my camel—peacefully grazing in the nearest area of dervish raid, and very angry at being called on to work after three days of idleness—and bumped away north towards Berber.

X.

THE MARCH OUT.

Alas for the Berber season—for the sprightly promise of its budding, the swift tragedy of its blight!

It would have been the most brilliant social year the town has ever known. Berber is peculiarly fitted for fashionable display: its central street would hold four Regent Streets abreast, and the low mud walls, with one-storeyed mud-houses just peeping over them, make it look wider yet. On this magnificent avenue the merchant princes of Berber display their rich emporia. Mortimer, Angelo, Walker, and half-a-dozen ending in -poulo, had brought caravans over the desert from Suakim, until you could buy oysters and asparagus, table-napkins and brilliantine, in the middle of the Sudan. Then there are the *cafés*,—"Officers' Club and Mineral Waters" is the usual title of a Sudan *café*,—where you could drink mastik and kinds of whisky, and listen to limpid streams of modern Greek from the mouths of elegants who shave twice and even three times a-week. There at sun-

down sat the native officers on chairs before the door, every breast bright with the ribbons of hard victorious campaigns, talking their ancestral Turkish and drinking drinks not contemplated by the Koran. There were five regiments in garrison, and more outside; the town was alive with generals, and the band played nightly to the Sirdar's dinner.

There was flavour in the sensation of sitting at dinner under the half-daylight of the tropic moon, kicking up black-brown sand, looking into a little yard with an unfenced sixty-foot undrinkable well in one corner and a heat-seamed mud wall all round it, and listening to a full military orchestra wailing for the Swanee Ribber, or giggling over the sorrows of Mr Gus Elen's friend, who somehow never felt 'isself at 'ome. For myself, I was just beginning to be very much at home indeed. It was a splendid house to share among three, one of the most palatial in Berber —two rooms as high as an English double-storeyed villa, doorway you could drive a hansom through, two window-holes in one room and one in the other, bricks of the finest quality of Nile mud, and roof of mats that never let in a single sunbeam. A fine house; and we had further embellished it with two tables—they cost a couple of pounds apiece, timber and carpenters being scarce in Berber—five shelves, a peg, and eight cane-bottomed bedroom chairs, brought across the desert in sections. In a fortnight our entertainments would have been the talk of Berber, and now——

To-night the High Street was as bare and bald, Berber as desolate and forlorn, as old Berber itself. Old Berber, you must know, is the Berber which was before the Mahdists came and took it and besomed it with three days' massacre. It stands, or totters, some half mile south of the present dervish-built town. Palms spread their sunshades over it, and it is embosomed in the purple-pink flower, white-green bush, and yellow-green fruit of Sodom apples. At a distance it is cool luxury; ride into it, and it is only the sun-dried skeleton of a city. In what was once the bazaar the bones are thickest: here are the empty sockets out of which looked the little shops—all silent, crumbling, and broken. Altogether there are acres and acres of Old Berber—quite dead and falling away, not a single soul in the whole desolation. But when the Egyptian army first came last year there were bodies—bodies left thirteen years unburied, and dry wounds yawning for vengeance.

New Berber to-day was hardly less forlorn. On the morning of March 15, the few passengers down the High Street all carried arms. Here was a man on a fleet camel: he would have sold it the day before for £20; now no price would tempt his Arab covetousness into parting with his possible salvation. Here strode a tall man with white gown kilted up above black legs: he carried a Remington rifle, and with his free hand pushed before him a donkey bearing a bundle and a bed. An angareb is the first

luxury of the Sudan: Egyptian soldiers, when angarebs are looted, can hardly be restrained from taking them away on their backs. This man was removing wardrobe and furniture together on one donkey. Down at the riverside every boat was busy; the natives were crossing over to the islands and to the western bank. Down at the landing-stage, three miles north of the town, where the hospital was and the post-office, and whither the telegraph was now removed, the 1st Battalion, now to form all the garrison of Berber, was building a fort.

And in their stores and *cafés* in the High Street, with twitching faces, sat the Greeks. They explained in half-voices that they could not move their stock because they had 400 camel-loads, and there were not ten camels to be bought in all Berber. They commented on the strange strategy that aims at beating the enemy rather than at protecting property. They even made a deputation to the Sirdar on the point; but his Excellency pursued his own plan, and merely served out Remingtons to the traders. Whereat the Greeks pointed out that the rifles and a few cases of wine and tinned meat against their doors would make them impregnable; and then fell to twitching again.

What it was all about, nobody among the outsiders knew. But we presumed that the gradual crescendo of intelligence as to the dervish advance had resulted in the decision that it was better to be in position too early than too late. The Sirdar left early on the 15th;

the greater part of the garrison—Macdonald's fighting brigade of blacks—had cleared the town the evening before and marched for Kenur, the point of concentration, when the moon rose at one in the morning. I saw the start of the 9th, the first black battalion raised; and fine as are many of our British regiments, these made them look very small. The Sudanese battalions, as has been said, are enlisted for life, and every black, wherever he may be found, is liable, as such, for service. I have seen a man who was with Maximilian in Mexico, in the Russo-Turkish War, across Africa with Stanley, and in all the later Egyptian campaigns, and who marches with his regiment yet. However old the black may be, he has the curious faculty of always looking about eighteen: only when you thrust your eyes right in his face do you notice that he is a wrinkled great-grandfather of eighty. But always he stands as straight as a lance.

Not that the 9th average that age, I take it; or if they do, it does not matter. Their height must average easily over six feet. They are willowy in figure, and their legs run to spindle-shanks, almost ridiculously; yet as they formed up on parade they moved not only with the scope that comes from length of limb, but the snap of self-controlled strength as well.

They love their soldiering, do the blacks, and take it very seriously. When they stood at attention they

might have been rows of black marble statues, all alike as in the ancient temples, filling up the little square of crumbling mud walls with a hole in its corner, so typical of the Berber landscape. Then the English colonel snapped out something Turkish: in an instant the lines of each company had become fours; all turned with a click; the band crashed out a march—barbaric Ethiopian, darky American, or English music-hall, it is all the same to the blacks—and out swung the regiment. They moved off by companies through a narrow alley, and there lay four new-killed goats, the sand lapping their blood. Every officer rode, every man stepped, over the luck token; they would never go out to fight without it. Then out into the main street, every man stepping like a conqueror, the band blaring war at their head; with each company a little flag—blue, black, white, amber, or green, or vermilion—on a spear, and half-way down the column the colour the Camerons gave them when they shared the glory of Ginnis. Boys trailed behind them, and their women, running to keep up, shot after them the thin screams that kindle Sudanese to victory. A black has been known to kill himself because his wife called him a coward. To me the sight of that magnificent regiment was a revelation. One has got accustomed to associate a black skin with something either slavish or comical. From their faces these men might have been loafing darkies in South Carolina or minstrels in St James's Hall. But in the smartness

of every movement, in the pride of every private's bearing, what a wonderful difference! This was quite a new kind of black—every man a warrior from his youth up. "Lu-u-u, lu-u-u," piped the women; the men held up their heads and made no sound, but you could see the answer to that appeal quivering all down the column. For "we," they say, "are like the English; we are not afraid."

And is it not good to think, ladies and gentlemen, as you walk in Piccadilly or the Mile End Road, that every one of these niggers honestly believes that to be English and to know fear are two things never heard of together? Utterly fearless themselves, savages brought up to think death in battle the natural lot of man, far preferable to defeat or disgrace, they have lived with English officers and English sergeants, through years of war and pestilence, and never seen any sign that these are not as contemptuous of death as themselves. They have seen many Englishmen die; they have never seen an Englishman show fear.

XI.

THE CONCENTRATION.

At the time I was disposed to blame the Mess President, but on calm reflection I see that the fault lay with the nature of the Arab. We knew that the Sirdar was to start early on the 15th on the eighteen-mile ride to Kenur, and it was our purpose to travel shortly behind him. The only restrictions, I may say at once, laid upon correspondents during this campaign were that they were not to go out on reconnaissances, and especially not to go near the Sirdar. They were advised not to stand in front of the firing line during general actions, but even this was not insisted upon. It did indeed require a fair deal of tact and agility to keep out of the Sirdar's eye, since his Excellency had a wearing habit of always appearing at any point where there was anything of interest going on. But practice soon brought proficiency, and for the rest the correspondent, except when he had to work, enjoyed by far the most enviable position in the army.

Therefore we had planned to start as soon as the

Sirdar was out of sight, and arrive just after he had disappeared into his quarters. We rose up at five and gloomily began to dismantle our home. We carted the tables and the chairs into the yard; we tore down the very shelves: who could tell when they would not be useful? By seven breakfast was over; the horses and camels were grouped around our door in the High Street; the bags and cases were fastened up and lying each on the right side of its right camel. There was nothing left but the chairs and the tables and the shelves and a bucket, and the breakfast things and a case to put them in. At eight I went out to see how things were looking; they were looking exactly the same, a question of precedence having arisen as to whose duty it was to wash up. At nine they were still the same, and we expostulated with the men: they said they were just ready. At ten the chairs and tables and breakfast things and camels were still lying about, and the men had disappeared. At eleven they had not returned. At twelve they condescended to return, and, adjourning the question of washing up, began packing the breakfast things dirty. At this point each man separately was called a dog, fined a pound, and promised fifty lashes. They received the judgment with surprised and wounded but respectful expostulation: what had they done? They had merely been in the bazaar a very little while, O thou Excellency, to buy food. By this time we were getting hungry; so, rather than delay the loading up, we went

to a Greek *café* and lunched on ptomained sardines and vinegar out of a Graves bottle. When we got back things were exactly as we had left them: the men suavely explained that they had been lunching too. At last at half-past one every camel had been loaded and stood up; and then it was discovered that all the chairs were being left behind. It became necessary to catch camels one by one, climb up them, and, standing on neck or hump, to tie two chairs apiece on to them. While the second was being done, the first walked away and rubbed himself against a wall, and knocked his chairs off again. Every one of the men rushed at him with furious yells; the second camel, left to himself, waddled up to the wall with an absent-minded air, and rubbed off his chairs.

At this point—about two in the afternoon, six hours after the contemplated start—human nature could bear it no longer. With curses and blows we told them to follow immediately if they valued their lives, and rode on. That was all they wanted. Looking back after a hundred yards we saw every camel loaded up and starting. If we had stayed behind we should never have got off that night. If we had ridden on six hours before we should not have been delayed. One time is as good as another to the Arab as long as he feels that he is wasting it. Give him half an hour and he will take an hour; allow him six hours and he will require twelve.

But of course by this time it was hopeless to expect

that the baggage would make eighteen miles by dark. At Essillem, a dozen miles out, we found Colonel Maxwell's brigade with all its baggage packed, waiting only camels to move on too. At Darmali we found exactly the same state of things. General Gatacre's never-failing hospitality produced dinner, after which we fell in with the disposition of the rest of the army, and waited for camels too. At ten, just as we were going to sleep in the sand in the middle of the main street of the village, they loafed up, very cheerful, and feeling quite sure that they would be neither fined nor flogged. Had they not covered thirteen miles in a trifle under eight hours?

Then suddenly I was awake again, at the shy meeting of a quarter-moon and dawn. The beginning of what I knew, after my boy came to my chilly bedchamber under a wall and said reveille was about to sound, was a monstrous confusion of camels. You could see that the ground was strewn with vague, shapeless, swaying lumps, with smaller, more agile shadows crawling over them. What they were was very plain from the noises: the camels had arrived. The camel, when it is a question of either working or leaving off work — so magnificently impartial is his stupidity—can protest in any voice from a wolf's snarl to the wail of an uncomforted child. As each camel was loaded it jerked up its towering height and towering load—one of ours this time, I blush to say, was two sacks of barley, a deal table, and all the eight

cane-bottomed chairs, waving their legs at the moon; and a weirdly disreputable sight it was—and then it was the next camel's turn to howl. It is a wonderful sight camels being loaded up, with buckets and table-legs and baths and tea-kettles, hung round them as if they were Christmas-trees; but one soon has enough of it. So I left them trying to eat the hospital stores, and rode slowly out into the twilight.

Outside the zariba a heavy black snake was forging slowly along the desert road; when I came nearer it changed into a centipede; then the centipede had a kilt on, and finally it divided into the Cameron Highlanders. In front of them were the Warwicks, behind them the Maxim battery—four guns with carriages and three mules tandem, two on tripods and one mule to carry the whole gun—and the Lincolns; the whole brigade was on the march. Only seventy-five men of each regiment remained, to their indignation, as guard for the stores that the camels must make a second journey to fetch. As for the heavy baggage, that was put in the houses of the village and left to its fate. Officers started with 30-lb. kit, and men with 9-lb. Scarcity of camels perhaps justified the abandonment, but with the thermometer already 100° in the shade, it meant a lot of hardship.

After a month and a half of General Gatacre, five miles with rifle and ammunition and 9-lb. kit is very much the same to the British soldier as walking downstairs to breakfast is to you. They were just getting

into their stride when the sun rose. The orange ball stepped up over the desert sky-line briskly and all in one piece, plainly intending to do a good day's work before he lay down again—and behold, we were at Kenur. Behold, also, the Sirdar's flag, white star and crescent on red, borne by one of three orderlies. Before it rode the Sirdar himself, in white apparel, fresh and cool, also like one who has his work before him and knows how it is done, and means to do it. The British halted. There was a word and a rattle, and the battalions which had been formed in one long column, four abreast, were marching off at right angles in columns of a company apiece. In no space and no time the whole brigade had tucked itself away and taken up its quarters. And hardly had the British left the road clear than in swung the second black brigade from Essillem.

These were different, many of them, from the lank soldiers of the 9th—short and stubby, plainly of other tribes; but whether the black has seventy-eight inches or sixty, every one of them is a soldier. They tramped past with their untirable bands drumming and blowing beside them; in a couple of hours they had cut their mimosa and made their zariba, and all the Dervishes in the Sudan would not be too many for them. The British, too, were out all day in the sun, at the same work, every man with his rifle on his back. It had warmed up a little more now—though 100° in the dry Sudan is not near so hot as it would be in

England—but the British stuck to their work like men, and their zariba, a word unknown to them two months back, was every bit as straight, and thick, and prickly as the natives'.

And now we were concentrated, and only waited for them to come on. And, wonderful beyond all hope, they were coming on. The indispensable gunboats, tirelessly patrolling the river, kept the Sirdar fully informed of everything. On Shebaliya Island, forty miles south of the Atbara, they had slung an angareb aloft between a couple of spars. The Dervishes' route led within twelve hundred yards of it. There they passed everlastingly — men, women, and children; horses, goats, and donkeys, singing and braying, flying their banners, thrumming their war-drums, booming their melancholy war-horn. And on the angareb, under an umbrella, sat a man and counted them. There was reason to hope that they were little short of 20,000.

Conformably with the traditions of the gunboat service, things did not stop at counting. On the 13th Bimbashi Sitwell and a section of the 4th Egyptians landed from the *Fatha*, Lieutenant Beatty's boat, and attacked a large force which had crossed to the island. There were about 1000 Dervishes and 40 Egyptians, but neither of the united services saw anything irregular in the proceedings. In face of the swarm of enemies Bimbashi Sitwell led his men into a ditch, whence they kept up a steady fire. Suddenly he felt

a tremendous blow on his shoulder; he thought one of the soldiers had let his rifle out of hand, but turning round to swear, found himself on his back. Then he heard the voice of Lieutenant Beatty, R.N.: "It's all right," it said; "we're doing 'em proper." "Make it so," he replied nautically, and then, hearing a new burst of fire from the right, "You'd better order up a few more file, and turn them out of that." The next thing he knew, after the blank, was that they were turned out of that, and that 38 of them were dead, which was very nearly one each for the 40 Egyptians.

Bimbashi Sitwell had a well-furnished pair of shoulders. The bullet ran through both, but missed the spine. Four days after, he was receiving visitors at Fort Atbara in pyjamas and a cigarette. Which was a happy issue to perhaps the most staggeringly audacious of all the audacities perpetrated by the gunboats on the Nile.

XII.

AT KENUR.

THE first thing I saw of the social life of Kenur was the Press censor shaving himself: he said that anybody might take any quarters that nobody else had taken. As he spoke my eye fell on a round tukl between the Sirdar's quarters, the Censor's, and the telegraph tent—plainly an ideal residence for correspondents. It appeared empty. True, it was not much bigger than a 'bus-driver's umbrella; but you could just get three men and a table into it. It would do very well for to-day: to-morrow we expected to fight. As it turned out, we stayed at Kenur four days, during which the tukl contracted hourly, till in the end it seemed nearly half big enough for one person. Moreover, it turned out to be tenanted after all—by enormous bees, which had dug out the inside of the wooden framework till the whole place was one large hive. Honour and prudence alike seemed to call for an attack on them. But on reflection I pointed out that the truest courage lay in sitting quite still

when a large bee settled on the back of your neck, and that the truest precaution lay in smoking tobacco. So we sat down quite still and smoked tobacco for four days.

Kenur was like all the villages in this part of the world, only if possible longer. All are built along the Nile, that the inhabitants may have as short a way as possible to go for water: Kenur was from two to three miles long, and the camp stretched the whole length of it. Between the camp and the river was nearly a mile of land once cultivated, now overgrown with Sodom apples. Nervous critics pointed out that dervishes might attack the long line of the zariba, and slip in between the force and its water. But most people knew that nothing of the sort would happen. The Sirdar is not the man to wait to be attacked, and the long, open camp was beautifully adapted for bringing out the whole army in fighting-line at a moment's notice.

The first afternoon at Kenur was enlivened by the advent of the first four companies of the Seaforths. They came by steamer, smiling all over, from colonel to private, to find they were in time. Down by the river to meet them was an enormous band drawn from all the blacks, bristling with half-jocose, half-ferocious swagger as the darlings always are. The Seaforths formed up into column, deep-chested, upstanding, undeniable, a delight to look upon; the Sirdar fell in by the colonel, the band began to wail out "Hieland

Laddie" and "Annie Laurie," and anything else it thought would make them feel at home, and off they swung towards the southern horn of the zariba. All round it they marched, every regiment, white, black, and yellow, lining the route in its turn, following its colonel in "Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!" Does not every native soldier know that the Highlanders have sworn to wear no trousers till they put them on in Khartum?

The second four companies came in next day, with an equal ear-splitting. Colonel Lewis's brigade at Fort Atbara was only five miles off, connected by telegraph, so that now we were complete. Meanwhile the days at Kenur were not wasted—days seldom are with the Sirdar about. Every morning at half-past six or so the whole force paraded and manœuvred. The first day's exercise was an attack in line, British on the right, Maxwell's in the centre, M'Donald's on the left. The two latter used the attack formation of the Egyptian army—four of each battalion's six companies in line and two in support. The British had three battalions in line and the four companies of the Seaforths in support: on each flank were guns, and the extreme battalion in each case was in column of companies. This was the formation in which the Sirdar advanced on Dongola in '96, except that the place of the flanking columns was there taken on the right by the cavalry—who now were of course reconnoitring all day—and on the left by the Nile with the gunboats.

The next day the force manœuvred in brigade squares in echelon, and the day after formed one square of the whole army, skeleton companies representing the Third Brigade. It was in the first of these formations that we did all the subsequent marching up the Atbara—a stately spectacle. On the right, and leading, was the British brigade—an advancing wave of desert-coloured khaki, with a dash of dark for the kilts of the Highlanders. They marched in columns of fours, that being a handy and flexible formation, and easily kept in line: the officer has only to see that four men are keeping a proper front with the rest of the brigade instead of fifty; and at the word all can wheel up into line in less than a minute. Next, leftward and clear in rear, so that an attack on its front or the British flank would meet a cross-fire, marched Maxwell's brigade. Leftward and in rear of that came Macdonald. The Egyptian forces, marching in line for the front and rear of the square, and in column for its flanks, and having darker uniform, made a denser blotch on the desert than the British. But dark or light, when you looked along the force it was tremendous, going forward wave by wave irresistibly, devouring the desert.

Thus, on the morning of Sunday, March 20, the force broke up from Kenur. The camp went wild, for the news said that Mahmud was actually on the Atbara at last. He had seized Hudi ford, it was said, seven miles from the junction of the rivers; and to

Hudi we were to march straight across the desert. The Intelligence Department more than half disbelieved the native stories. The native has no words for distance and number but "near" and "far," "few" and "many"; "near" may be anything within twenty miles, while "many" ranges from a hundred to a hundred thousand. However we marched—eleven miles at two miles an hour, in a choking sand-storm that muffled the sun to a pale winter moon, till at three in the afternoon we struck the river at Hudi. Here we found three battalions of Lewis's brigade, the 15th being left to garrison Fort Atbara; but devil a dervish.

XIII.

ON THE ATBARA.

Coming down to the Atbara after the desert was like entering the gates of heaven. To you in England, fields pulsing with green wheat and gardens aflame with tulips, it might have seemed faded. To us it was paradise.

The north bank drops twenty feet plumb to the sky-blue river. A stone's-throw across, the other bank is splashed with grass that struggles against jaundice; but it is real grass, and almost greenish, and after the desert we are very grateful for it. Beyond that shelves a bare white-brown beach, thirsty for flood-time; beyond that a wall of white-green new-fledged mimosa topped with turrets of palm. Over it all the intense blue canopy of midday, the fires of sunset, or the black roof of midnight pierced with innumerable stars, so white and clear that you almost hold up your hand to touch them — it was worth a couple of marches of sand-storm to come into such a land.

Our side, too, was thick with mimosa and dom-palm, and tufted with grass—great coarse bunches, mostly as thick as straw and as yellow; but a few blades maintained a bloodless green, and horses and camels went without their sleep to tear at them. The camels eat the mimosa too—elsewhere a bush that grows thorns and little yellow honey-breathing fluff-balls, but on the fruitful Atbara a cedar-spreading tree, with young leaves like an acacia's. The camels rear up their affected heads, and ecstatically scrunch thorns that would run any other beast's tongue through; their lips drop blood, but they never notice it. And the blacks eat the dom-nuts—things like petrified prize apricots, whose kernel makes vegetable ivory, and whose husks, they say, taste like ginger-bread; though, having no ore-crusher in my kit, I cannot speak to that. But lanky Sambo was never tired of shying at them as they clustered just above the dead leaves and just below the green, and Private Atkins lent a hand with enthusiasm. Then Sambo would grin all round his head and crack the flinty things between his shining teeth, and Thomas would stand staring at him, uncertain whether he was a long-lost brother-in-arms or something out of a circus.

They might well chew mimosa, and halfa-grass, and dom-nuts, for even on the river we were in a desert. We marched and camped in an utterly empty land. Atbara banks are green, birds whistle and coo in the tree-tops, now and again a hare switchbacks

across the line of march; but along all the river there was not one living man. Here on the Atbara there were but rare traces of population—a few stones, half buried, standing for salt-workings, or a round, half washed-out mud-bank for a wall.

In the empty Nile villages their bones were long ago gnawed white by jackals and hyenas, their sons were speared and thrown into the river, their wives and daughters led away to the harems of Omdurman. It is good land for the Sudan in this corner of the two rivers, worth, in places, perhaps as much as a penny an acre; and the Khalifa has swept it quite clean, and left it quite soulless.

And soulless it seemed to stay. We slept one night at Hudi in a sand-floored quadrangle of zariba, and you could hear the men expecting battle through their sleep. Next day, still looking to see black heads and spears rise over every sky-line, we marched to Ras el Hudi, six miles farther. Both Hudis were fords over the Atbara, and where one ended the other began: as the river was already nearly all ford, and the whole place contained not a single hut, you could call anywhere anything you liked. That same day (March 21st) the cavalry found the enemy. Perhaps it would be more strictly correct to say that the enemy found them: they were halted and dismounted when the Dervish horse suddenly attacked the sentries. The troopers were in their saddles and out at the enemy smartly enough, and after a short

scuffle the Dervishes sheered off into the bush. The cavalry lost seven troopers killed and eight wounded, of whom two died next day. These were the first fatalities of the campaign.

Next day, the bulk of the force remaining in Ras Hudi camp, a stronger reconnaissance went out—all the cavalry, with Maxims and the 13th Sudanese in support. Just as we were sitting down to breakfast we heard heavy firing up river. On the sound rang out bugles; syces could be seen frantically slamming saddles on to horses, and tugging them over to the Sirdar's headquarters. Ten seconds later the whole force was getting under arms. I pushed a tinned sausage down my throat and a biscuit into my holster, looked that my water-bottle was both full and well-corked — of course it was neither — and blundered through tussocks and mimosa-thorns out of camp. Already the long columns of khaki were combining into brigade-squares; in a matter of minutes the army was riveted together and rolling majestically over the swaying desert towards the firing. This time, by a variation on the usual order, Macdonald's brigade was on the right, its front level with Gatacre's, while Maxwell was echeloned on the left, and Lewis in support: the reason for this was that half a mile of bush fringed the Atbara, and the blacks were expected to be handier in it than the British. So we marched and marched. The British officers had had no breakfast, but they were used to that by now: officers and men—white,

black, and brown—all tingled with the exultant anticipation of battle. At last, four miles or so out of camp, we halted before a mile-wide slope of stony gravel—a God-sent field of fire. On the brow we could see a picket of cavalry: presently a rider detached himself, and came bucketing towards the Sirdar's flag. The order was given to load, and the sigh of contentment could be heard above the clatter of locks. It had come at last!

But it hadn't. We had noted it as ominous that no more firing had beckoned us as we advanced. The reconnaissance and the fight alike seemed to have faded in front of us like a mirage. The sun was getting hot overhead: to go on indefinitely without any kind of baggage was not to be thought of. "Rise up, men, and prepare to go home," came the reluctant order. The army rose up and faced about, and cursed its way into camp again. It turned out afterwards that the enemy's cavalry had appeared in force, and that ours led them back to the 13th. Collinson Bey formed square, and gave them a volley or two at half a mile or so. A few Dervishes came out of their saddles; and that was all, for they fell back and reappeared no more.

After that came to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow. Some days there was a little shooting, other days there was not; and we in camp heard and saw nothing in either case. Every morning one or two native battalions with Maxims went out, support-

ing the cavalry. They went out about three, and frizzled through morning, midday, and afternoon at a genial spot called Khor Abadar, five or six miles out: a khor is a dry desert watercourse, but this one was no more—nor less—than about a mile of what looked like rather rough sea solidified into clay. Having frizzled duly there all day, they would swing in again at seven or so, striding into camp bolt upright and with a jaunty snap, as if they had been out a quarter of an hour for a constitutional. You could always tell when the reconnaissance was coming in by the rolls of dust that blotted out the camp. At the corner where they stepped inside the zariba, Blackfriars on a November night was midday to it. You caught at a black face and the top of a shouldered rifle floating past from one eye to the other; you felt, rather than beheld, a looming horse-head and lance-butt over your shoulder. You neither saw nor heard, but were aware of regiments and squadrons as in the dream of a dog-sleep. And as lazy day sweated after lazy day, the whole camp and the whole army began to dim into the phantom of a dream. The vivacious, never-sleepy bugles became a singing in your ear, the ripple of sun on bayonets was spots before the eyes, the rumour of the crouching enemy was the echo of a half-remembered fairy tale very, very far away.

For, to be quite truthful, during that long succession of to-morrows at Ras el Hudi, nobody quite knew where the Dervishes were. It was quite certain they

were somewhere near, for their cavalry was seen almost daily; and they must be camped on the Atbara, for there was nowhere else whence they could get water. We were quite confident that they were there, and that the fight was coming, and we invented all sorts of stories to explain their delay in coming on. They started down the Nile fast; they have slackened now—so we assured ourselves—to wait for their rear-guard, or to reconnoitre, or to knock down dom-nuts, or for any of a thousand reasons, and we were here a day sooner than was necessary. A day too soon, of course, was nothing—or rather it would be nothing after we had fought; at present an extra day certainly meant a little longer discomfort. You must remember that the army was nearly 1400 miles from the sea, and about 1200 from any place that the things armies want could possibly come from. It had to be supplied along a sand-banked river, a single line of rail, which was carrying the material for its own construction as well, and various camel-tracks. That 13,000 men could ever have been brought into this hungry limbo at all shows that the Sirdar is the only English general who has known how to campaign in this country. The real enemy, he has seen, is not the Dervishes, whom we have always beaten, but the Sudan itself.

He was conquering it; but for the moment the Sudan had an opening, and began trying us rather high. Not me personally, who had three camels

and two blankets and much tinned meat. To me and my likes the Sirdar's refusal of transport—most natural and proper, after all—had been a blessing; it had made correspondents self-supporting, and therewith rich. But for the moment the want of transport and Mahmud's delay in coming on was hard on the troops—especially hard on the British brigade, and hardest of all on their officers. Officers and men came alike with one blanket and no overcoat. Now you must know that, though the Sudan can be live coals by day, it can be aching ice by night. It is the healthiest climate in the world if you have shade at noon and many rugs an hour before reveille; but if you have not, and especially if you happen to be a kilted Highlander, it interferes with sleep.

You must further remember that we left Kenur with the intention of fighting next day or the next. The British took the expectation seriously; the Egyptian officers did not. "You see," said one, "I've been in this bally country five years; so when I was told to bring two days' kit, I brought a fortnight's." He was now sending his private camel back to Fort Atbara for more; the officers of the British brigade had no private camels. The officers had brought only what could go into a haversack, which includes, roughly, soap and a sponge, and a toothbrush and a towel, but not a clean shirt, nor a handkerchief, nor shaving-tackle; so that the gilded popinjays were a little tarnished just at present. One

of them said, most truly, that an English tramp in summer, with a sweet haystack to sleep under, and sixpence a-day for bread and cheese and beer at wayside inns, was out of reckoning better off than a British officer on the banks of the Atbara. He slept on a pillow of dusty sand, which worked steadily into his hair; he got up in the middle of the night to patrol; then he lay down again and shivered. The men could sleep three together under a triple layer of blanket; the officers must sleep each in his position on the flank or in the centre of his company. When he got up in the morning he had nothing to shave with, and lucky if he got a wash. The one camel-load of mess stores was wellnigh eaten up by now; he received the same ration as the men. His one shirt was no longer clean; he hardly dared pull out his one handkerchief; he went barefoot inside his boots while his socks were being washed. And always—night or day, on fatigue or at leisure, relatively clean or unredeemedly dirty, when he had borrowed a shave and felt almost like a gentleman again, or when he lay with his head in the dust and the black private doubted whether he should salute or not—his first paternal thought was the wellbeing of his men.

When we found Mahmud he should pay for it. But in the meantime where was he? There was a perpetual series of cavalry reconnaissances, and a perpetual stream of scallywags coming in from his camp. Any day from dawn to dark you might see

half-clothed black men squatting before Colonel Wingate. Some were fairly fat; some were bags of bones. But all stated with one consent that they were hungry, and having received refreshment felt that they could do no less than tell Colonel Wingate such tidings as they conceived he would like to hear. There was no such thing as a place on the Atbara, as I have explained: there were names on the map, but as they named nothing in particular you could put them anywhere you liked within ten miles or so. Also, there is no such thing as distance in the native mind, so that the native also could locate anything anywhere that seemed convenient.

On the 27th Bimbashi Haig reconnoitred the opposite bank of the Atbara up to Manawi—say eighteen miles—and saw no trace of the enemy. Combining that fact with the precipitate from the scallywags' stories, we came to the conclusion that Mahmud and Osman were on the southern bank, somewhere near the spot marked on the map as Hilgi. It was believed that on the first news of the first cavalry contact they entrenched themselves there in a four-mile belt of scrub. Now General Hunter had made a reconnaissance up the Atbara last winter as far as Adarama—indispensably informative it turned out—and the Staff know what sort of scrub it is. It is an impenetrable, flesh-tearing jungle of mimosa-spears and dom-palm and stumbly halfa-grass and hanging ropes of creeper: no army in the world could possibly attack through it.

That being so, the Sirdar's course appeared to be to wait at Ras el Hudi until Mahmud came out. Hunger might bring him out—only as yet it had not. The more trustworthy of the deserters said that there was still a certain store of food. You must know that the Dervishes have honeycombed the Sudan with caches of buried grain: many have been found and opened by the Egyptian army, but it is possible that some remain to draw on. Moreover, men who were at Toski told how, in the starving army of Wad-el-Nejumi, the fighting men were well fed enough: it was the women and the children and the followers whose ribs broke through the skin. The scallywags were starved, of course: that is why they came in, and being starved themselves they saw the whole army in like case. But it seemed by the best information that what with food they brought, and stores they found, and dom-nuts they knocked off the trees, the dervishes had a few days of fairly filled stomach before them yet.

Then how to fetch them out? The situation called for a bold stroke, and the Sirdar answered it, after his wont, with a bold and safe one. On the morning of March 24 the 15th Egyptians left Fort Atbara in the three gunboats for Shendi. Left at Shendi were all the women of Mahmud's force, and with his women gone the Sudani is only half a man. It might draw him and it might not; it was worth trying.

XIV.

THE RAID ON SHENDI.

I HAD stepped out in the morning to pick fruit from the *sanduk* for breakfast. Below me, in the shallow river, a damson-skinned black was bathing and washing his white Friday clothes and whistling "The British Grenadiers." The sun was just up; but in the Sudan he begins to blister things the moment he is over the horizon. The *sanduk* lay on the south side of the north wall of our zariba. Greengages were glittering in the young sunshine; but to pull up misapprehension, I may as well say at once that *sanduk* is the Arabic for provision-case, and that our greengages glittered through glass bottles. It may be that you were never much attracted by bottled fruits. But they taste of fruit a good deal more than tinned ones; and when your midday is six hours of solid 110 in the shade, you will find bottled fruits one of the things least impossible to eat that you are likely to get.

Therewith entered the Mess-President's head camel-

man. He was a Jaali by tribe; his name meant "Powerful in the Faith"; and in this wilderness I liked to think that if he were not black, and had no moustache, and no razor-cut tribal marks on his cheeks, his tilted nose and smiling teeth, and erect, sprightly carriage would make him a rather pretty-ugly French girl. He approached his lord's bed before the tent door and pattered Arabic faster than I can keep up with. But the sum of his tale was this: that the raid on Shendi had been a great success, many Dervishes were slain, and many taken, with many women and children; that his fellow-Jaalin had done best part of the execution, and that the 15th Battalion was already back again at Fort Atbara.

Then let us go to Fort Atbara, said we, and hear all about it. We are going mouldy for want of exercise —and, to be quite open with you, the liquor famine here is getting grave. Last night the boy came up with a couple of bottles: "Only two wine more," said he, and mournfully displayed one Scrubbs's Cloudy Ammonia — try it in your bath, but not in your drinking-cup — and one Elliman's Embrocation. So saddle up; it is 1000 to 5 against a fight here to-day, and it is better to sweat a-horseback in the desert oven-blast than fry in sand and camp-smells here.

So the Mess-President and I picked our way over the spongy ground outside camp where the water lies in flood time, and then swung out, quarter of an hour canter and ten minutes walk, over the hard sand and

gravel of the desert. The way from Fort Atbara was trodden already into a road as broad as Berber High Street, and almost as populous—now a white-underclothed Jaali scallywag with a Remington and a donkey, now a lolloping convoy of camels, now a couple of Greeks with stores. For the Jew, as we know him, is a child for commercial enterprise alongside the Sudan Greek. A Greek had his ovens going on Ferkee field before the last shot was fired; the moment the Suakim road was opened the Greek's camels were on it. The few English merchants here were hard and enterprising, and they had good stuff—only just when you wanted it, it was usually just a day's journey away. The Greek gets his stuff up everywhere: it is often inferior stuff, and he caravans it with a double-barrelled rifle on his shoulder and visions of Dervishes behind every mimosa bush; but he gets it up. He charges high for it, but he deserves every piastre he gets.

At Fort Atbara there stood already a small bazaar of tukls, and a pink shirt-sleeved, black-stubble-chinned Greek in each among his wares. There we laid in every known liquor except claret and beer; there we even got six dozen Pilsener-bottles of soda-water — of such are the privations of the Sudan. Most of the Greeks seemed to confine their energies to sardines, many degrees over proof. But one had planted a little salad-garden; another knew where he could get tomatoes; a third specialised in scented

soap and stationery. Remember, we were twelve hundred miles from the nearest place where people buy such things in shops; remember, too, that not an inch of Government truck or steamer could be spared for private dealers; and then you will realise what a Nansen of retail trade is the Sudan Greek.

But a correspondent cannot live by soda-water and tabasco sauce alone: let us try to acquire some information. In the commanderia—that stable house of mud, six-roomed and lofty roofed, the stateliest mansion of the Sudan—sits Hickman Bey, who swept out Shendi. In the English army it would be almost a scandal that an officer of his service should go anywhere or do anything. The Egyptian army is an army of young men, with the red-hot dash of a boy tempered by responsibility into the fine steel of a man at his best for both plan and deed.

But about the raid. To listen to any one of the men who conducted it you would think that he had been a passenger, and that all the others had done all the work: that is their way. The three gunboats with their naval officers—now you observe the full significance of the fact that the British Navy's command of the sea runs up to the Sixth Cataract—with the 15th Battalion, guns, and 150 friendly Jaalin, left Fort Atbara on March 24. They were to have surprised Shendi in the morning of the 26th; but luck was bad, though it turned out not to matter much. One of the boats went aground, as boats will

on a daily falling Nile. It took some hours to get her off, and then, as it was too late for Saturday morning, and an afternoon attack would leave no light for pursuit, it was decided to make it Sunday. So the boats went slow, stopping here and there to wood up on the depeopled banks; but at one place it fell out that the landing-party came on three Dervishes. One of them got away with his skin and the alarm. When he came to Shendi the garrison—700 men with many women and children — were tom-tomming a fantasia on account of an alleged victory whereof Mahmud had advertised them. The fantasia broke up hurriedly, and all the best quality women were sent away on camels to Omdurman. That meant, of course, the Baggara Arab women. The women of the black riflemen and spearmen were left to shift.

At ten on Sunday morning Colonel Hickman and his raiders duly appeared and landed. They found the enemy drawn up between the bank and rising ground; there were four forts—one sunken, three circular earth walls—but Mahmud took away the guns with him. The Fifteenth formed column of fours and marched placidly in front of the enemy, taking not the least notice of their fire—which indeed hurt nobody—till it outflanked their left. The two forces were then more or less like a couple of L's lying on their backs, one inside the other. The dervish L was the inside one—the stem of it fighting men and the foot scally-

wags carrying bundles; the Egyptian L's stem was the Fifteenth, and its foot, stretching inland towards the loot, the Jaalin.

Bimbashi Peake, of the Artillery, let off two rounds of shrapnel over the scallywags, and the fight was over. Instantly the plain was quite black with the baggage the dervishes dropped — bundles of clothes, angarebs, chairs, big war-drums, helmets, spears, gibbas, bags of dhurra, donkeys, horses, women, children. Every dervish was making for Omdurman as hard as his legs would let him.

Now came the Jaalin's chance. The Jaalin used to be a flourishing tribe, and inhabited the island of Meroe—the country between the Atbara and the Blue Nile. A few years ago the tribe had a difference of opinion with the Khalifa: there are not many Jaalin now, and what there are inhabit where they can. The survivors are anxious to redress the balance by removing a corresponding proportion of Baggara, and they began. After a time they came to Hickman Bey, panting, but only half happy. "It is very good, O thou Excellency," they cried; "we're killing them splendidly. They're all out in the desert, only we can't get at them to kill them enough. Can't we have some of the donkeys to pursue on?" "Take the lot," said his Excellency.

So the island of Meroe beheld the novel sight of Baggara cavalry, on brood mares with foals at foot,

fleeing for their lives before Jaalin on donkeys. Most of the five-and-twenty horsemen got away to tell the news to the Khalifa; by this time probably their right hands and right feet were off. The footmen the Jaalin pursued till ten at night, and slew to the tune of 160; also there were 645 prisoners, mostly women. They got a tremendous reception from the women at Fort Atbara when they reached it, and joined in it themselves quite unaffectedly. By now they are probably the wives of such black soldiers as are allowed to marry; as like as not many of them actually had husbands, brothers, sons, fathers in one Sudanese battalion or another. A Sudan lady's married life is full of incident in these days; it might move the envy of Fargo, North Dakota. But when all is said and done, a black soldier with a life engagement at 15s. a-month minimum, with rations and allowances, is a more brilliant catch than any Baggara that ever came out of Darfur.

It was a raid that for neatness and thoroughness might teach a lesson to Osman Digna himself. What Osman and Mahmud said when they heard their men's women were gone, and that their own retreat along the Nile could be harried for a hundred miles as far as Shabluka, I do not pretend to know. I should be sorry to meet any of the ends they must have invoked upon all the Sirdar's relatives.

And when we got back, and the camels seesawed

in with the *sanduks*, the cook, for all his new wealth, was very angry. "You have brought no curry-powder, O thou Effendim," he said. "You didn't say you wanted any curry-powder," the Mess-President defended himself. "Yes I did," said the cook, sternly; "I said we were short of *all* vegetables."

XV.

REST AND RECONNAISSANCES.

The force remained in camp at Ras el Hudi till April 3. Mahmud's exact position was still undetermined, his intentions yet more so. It was a queer state of things—two armies within twenty miles of each other, both presumably wishful to fight, both liable to run short of provisions, yet neither attacking and neither quite sure where the other was. But the Sirdar had always the winning hand. While he sat on the Atbara Mahmud was stale-mated. It may be supposed that he came down the Nile to fight: very well, here was the Sirdar ready to fight and beat him. Osman Digna probably had raiding in his head. But he could not raid Berber while the Sirdar was below him on the Atbara: that would have meant seventy miles across the desert, with wells choked up—though he may not have known this—and the Sirdar always liable to attack him on flank or to get to Berber before him. One day we had a report that he had started on a journey the other way, towards Adarama; but, if he

ever went at all, it was probably to dig up grain: there was nothing worth raiding about Adarama. Finally, now that Shendi was destroyed, to go back meant ruin; the blacks, irritated by the loss of their women, would desert; the gunboats would harry the retreat as far as Shabluka; it was even possible that the whole Anglo-Egyptian force would get to the Nile before they did. And if he stayed where he was, then in the end he must either fight or starve.

Mahmud was stale-mated, no doubt, whatever course he took; only in the meantime he took none. He did not move, he did not fight, and he did not starve. And we were still not quite sure where he was. The army stayed a fortnight in Ras Hudi camp, reconnoitring daily, with an enemy within twenty miles, whose precise position it did not know. It hardly seems to speak well for the cavalry. Yet it would be most unjust to blame them: the truth is that the Egyptian cavalry was hopelessly outnumbered and outmatched. Broadwood Bey had eight squadrons—say 800 lances—with eight Maxims and one horse battery. There were also two companies of camel-corps, but these were generally wanted for convoys. Against this Mahmud, as he said afterwards himself, had 4000 Baggara horse.

Furthermore, it cannot be said that the Egyptian cavalry were above criticism. They were enormously improved, as will shortly be seen: ever since the Dongola campaign they had come on greatly, but it is

doubtful whether they will ever have the dash of the best European or Indian cavalry. They have great merits: in an empty land they will live on almost nothing, and no stretch of work can subdue their iron bodies to fatigue. They are no longer open to suspicion on the score of courage. But in reconnaissance work they want smartness and intelligence. It could not be imputed to them as a fault that they did not ride through five times their force and see what was behind. But it was a fact that the Baggara worked better in the bush than they did. Day after day they would ride out and see nobody or only a vedette or two; as soon as they began to retire they were followed by dervishes, who had apparently been seeing them all the time. An officer told me that one day, walking out from Fort Atbara, he saw a returning patrol under a native lieutenant. He stood still under a tree to see if they would see him: they passed him by like men asleep. In a word, the Egyptian trooper is what it is inevitable he should be. You cannot breed a light quick-witted scout out of a hundred centuries of drudgery and serfdom. He will improve with time; meanwhile he is still a fellah

Considering the quantity and quality of their material, it was wonderful that Broadwood Bey and his British officers did as much as they did. To work the weakest arm of a force cannot be inspiriting work, but they stuck to it with unquenchable courage and inexhaustible patience. If it be

asked why the cavalry was not strengthened with British or Indian regiments, the answer is very easy. It was almost a miracle that so large a force had been got up to the Atbara and fed there; to bring up more horses into a country almost naked of fodder was a physical impossibility, too impossible even for Sir Herbert Kitchener.

But if the cavalry was for a while unsuccessful in localising Mahmud's entrenchment, it was wholly successful in keeping his scouts from coming near us, and that was no small achievement. The Baggara might have made things very unpleasant for us even at Ras el Hudi. But for the patrols of the unwearying cavalry they could easily have crept up in the bush across the river and fired into camp all night every night. They might have got below the camp and cut up convoy after convoy till hunger drove the Sirdar down to Fort Atbara again and opened the way to Berber. We sat day after day and wondered why they never did it; but they never did.

At last, on March 30, General Hunter went out. With him went the cavalry, the horse-battery, and four Maxims, while two battalions of infantry and a field battery were advanced in support to Khor Abadar. When he got back that evening everybody knew that Mahmud's stronghold was found. He had gone on until he came to it. He had ridden up to within 300 yards of it and looked in. What he saw, of course, the Intelligence Department knew better

than I did, but some things were common property. The position faced the open desert—we all breathed freely at this—and went right back through the scrub to the river. Round it ran a tremendous zariba three miles long, and in the centre, on an eminence, were trenches affording three tiers of fire. This proved to be an exaggeration as regarded size, and a misunderstanding otherwise: the triple trench ran nearly round the position. What was certain and to the point was that the place was trimmed with black heads, but that their owners seemed reluctant to come out. The horse-battery gave them a score of rounds or so, but they made no answer, and in their thick bush any casualties they may have had were safely concealed.

However, here at last was Mahmud marked down. To be precise, he was at Nakheila, eighteen miles away, as the cavalry and Staff said, though, when the infantry came to foot it, they made it well over twenty: every infantry man knows how cavalry and Staff will underrate distances. Wherever he was, we knew the way to him, and we could take our time. Now what would the Sirdar do?

For the next two days the camp buzzed with strategy and tactics. It was no longer what Mahmud would do: Mahmud, as we have seen, could do nothing. But would the Sirdar wait for him to starve into attack or dispersal, or would he go for Nakheila? Many people thought that, being a careful man, he would wait and not risk the loss an attack would

cost; but they were wrong. On the evening of April 1 it became known that we were moving on the morning of the 3rd four miles forward to Abadar. Some theorists still held out that the change of camp was a mere matter of health; and indeed sanitation had long cried for it. Others held that the Sirdar was not the man to lengthen his line of communication for nothing: the move meant attack.

What considerations resolved the Sirdar to storm Mahmud's zariba, I do not pretend to know. But many arguments for his decision suggested themselves at once. It was true that the Dervishes could not stay at Nakheila for ever, but as yet there was no sign of starvation from them. On the other hand, it was no joke to supply 12,000 men even seventeen miles from Fort Atbara by camel-transport alone: as time wore on and camels wore out, it became less and less easy. Secondly, the white brigade was beginning to feel the heat, the inadequate shelter, and the poor food: up to now its state of health had been wonderful—only two per cent of sick or thereabouts—but now began to appear dysentery and enteric. Finally, it was hardly fitting that so large a British force should sit down within twenty miles of an enemy and not smash him. There was a good deal of lurking sympathy with Mahdism in some Egyptian quarters far enough away not to know what Mahdism was: to shrink from a decisive attack would nourish it. The effect on the troops themselves would be disheartening, and dis-

heartenment spells lassitude and sickness. And to the Dervishes themselves a battle would be a far more killing blow than a dispersal and retreat. In all dealings with a savage enemy, I suppose the rule holds that it is better and cheaper in the end to attack, and attack, and attack again. All considerations of military reputation pleaded unanimously that Mahmud must be destroyed in battle; and at last the army was on the direct road to destroy him.

XVI.

CAMEL-CORPS AND CAVALRY.

"CAMEL-CORPS luck," said the Bimbashi, and smiled bitterly, then swore. "O my God, if this is the big show!"

Climbing up over sand-bags on to one of the gun-platforms of Fort Atbara, we crouched in the embrasure and listened. Boom—boom—boom; very faint, but very distinct, and at half-minute intervals. We had ridden in the day before from the Sirdar's camp up the Atbara to buy more bottled fruit and, alas! more gin from the Greek shanties on the Nile beach. A convoy, on a similar errand, had been attacked by Dervishes half an hour after we had passed it, yet we heard not a shot. To-day, all this way off, we heard plainly: it must be an action indeed. Our own army, we knew, was not to move. Could it be that Mahmud had come down and was attacking us at Abadar? And we eighteen miles away at Fort Atbara, and down there in the sand-drift roadway the wobbling, grousing camels, that were to be conveyed

out at two miles an hour! We joined the Bimbashi, and cursed miserably on the chance of it.

But no, we struggled to persuade ourselves, it couldn't be so bad as that. It must be a battalion come out to clear the road for our convoy. Or it must be the reconnaissance that was going up to the dervish zariba at Nakheila. Correspondents are not allowed to go with reconnaissances, so that if it is only that, there's no great loss after all. Anyhow it is eleven o'clock now. The baggage camels have lolloped out under the mud guard-house, through the fort-gate, through the gap in the mimosa-thorn zariba. The camel-corps escort is closing up in rear: we are off.

Half a mile ahead ride five blacks, their camels keeping perfect line. The sun flashes angrily on their rifle-barrels, but they look him steadily in the face, peering with puckered eyes over the desert below them: in this land of dust and low scrub a camel's hump is almost a war balloon. Far out on their right I see a warily advancing dot, which is four more; a black dot on the rising leftward skyline, three more; out on the right flank of the baggage camels, shaving the riverside thickets, gleam white spider legs, which are a couple of camel-troopers more. They stop and examine a track; they break into a trot and disappear behind a palm clump; they reappear walking. But the main force of the two companies rides close about the swinging quadrangle of baggage camels—in front,

on flank, in rear. Slowly and sleepily the mass of beasts strolls on into the desert, careless what horsemen might be wheeling into line behind the ridge, or what riflemen might be ambushed in the scrub. But the scouts in front are looking at every footprint, over every skyline, behind every clump of camel-thorn.

To be out of an exciting action is camel-corps luck; this is camel-corps work. The Bimbashi missed his part in the reconnaissance to ride all night and guard the menaced convoy; he slept one hour at dawn, and now returns in the sun. He is quite fresh and active. This is his usual work; but he is not happy because this also is his usual luck. Only the Egyptian army would have found it very difficult to do without him and his desert cavalry in the past, and even now, with all the desert roads except the Bayuda behind it, finds plenty of work for the camel-corps still. And one day they say, "Take out twenty camels," and the next day, "Take out the rest." The next day, "Those twenty that weren't out yesterday can't possibly be tired"—but the Bimbashi goes out every day. The skin is scaled off his nose with sun, and his eyes are bloodshot with sand, and the hairs of his moustache have snapped off short with drought, and his hair is bleaching to white. All that is the hall-mark of the Sudan.

Getting into the saddle had been like sitting down suddenly in a too hot bath; by this time you could not bear your hand upon it. Out in the desert

gleamed the steel-blue water and black reflected trees of the mirage; even in mirage there is no green in the midday sun of the Sudan. What should be green is black; all else is sun-coloured. It is torment to face the gaudy glare that stabs your eyes. If you lift them to the sky it is not very blue—I have seen far deeper in England; but it is alive all over with quivering passionate heat. Beating from above and burning from below, the sun strikes at you heavily. There is no way out of it except through the hours into evening. No sound but boot clinking on camel-stirrup: you hear it through a haze. You ride along at a walk, half dead. You neither feel nor think, you hardly even know that it is hot. You just have consciousness of a heavy load hardly to be borne, pressing, pressing down on you, crushing you under the dead weight of sun.

We met the usual people — a Greek with four camels, a bare-legged boy on a donkey, a bare-breasted woman under a bundle — the second and third-class passengers of the desert. We questioned them with alternate triumph and despair, as they answered alternately after their kind. One said it was two squadrons, a battery, and a battalion fighting in our old camp at Ras Hudi; another said Mahmud had come down to Abadar and had fought the Sirdar for four hours; another said Mahmud had gone right away, and that the whole Anglo-Egyptian army had gone after him. Every story was wholly false, be-

gotten only of a wish to please; whence you perceive the advantages enjoyed by him who would collect intelligence in the Sudan.

Slowly the minutes crawled on; the camels crawled slower. On days like this you feel yourself growing older: it seemed months since we heard the guns from the parapet; it would have hardly seemed wonderful if we had heard that the campaign had been finished while we were away. We had ridden awhile with the Bimbashi, but conversation wilted in the sun; now we had ambled ahead till even the advanced guard had dropped out of sight behind. One servant with us rode a tall fast camel; from that watch-tower he suddenly discerned cases lying open on the sand about a hundred yards off the trampled road. Anything for an incident: we rode listlessly up and looked. A couple of broken packing-cases, two tins of sardines, a tin of biscuits, half empty, a small case of empty soda-bottles with "Sirdar" stencilled on it, and a couple of empty bottles of whisky. Among them lay a cigarette-box with a needle and a reel of cotton, a few buttons, and a badge—A.S.C.—such as the Army Service Corps wear on their shoulder-straps.

We were on the scene of last evening's raid. Two camels, we remembered, had been cut off and the loads lost. We found the marks on the sand where the convoy-camels had knelt down in living zariba to wait for relief from Abadar, seven miles away. All the

time it took to fetch the camel-corps the Dervishes must have lurked in the bush eating biscuits and drinking the whisky of the infidel. The Sirdar's soda-water was plainly returned empties, so that they would have found the whisky strong; the sardines, not knowing the nature of tinned meats, they had thrown away. We waited to report to the Bimbashi.

Presently the convoy crept up, a confusion of vague necks and serpent heads, waving like tentacles. The Bimbashi had given his horse to an orderly, and was sleeping peacefully on his camel. Now we had found among the scattered camel-loads a wineglass, broken in the stem, but providentially intact in the bowl. Also we had bought for a great price at Fort Atbara four eggs, and had whisky wherein to break them. So the Bimbashi slipped off his camel all in one piece, and we lunched.

By now the damned sun was taking his hand off us. We were slipping through his fingers; he was low down behind us, and his rays sprawled into larger and longer shadows. Then he went down in a last sullen fusion of gold. The camels, feeling themselves checked, flopped down where they stood; the drivers flopped down beside them, and bobbed their heads in the approximate direction of Mecca. They might well give thanks; with sunset the world had come to life again. A slight air sprang up, and a gallop fanned it to a grateful breeze. Soon the eastern sky became a pillar of dust; the horses in

camp were being led to water. The great fight was still timed for the day after to-morrow, and another twelve hours of sunlessness were before us.

The camp was just as we had left it, all but for one piece of news: the cavalry had had a fight, and had fought well against every arm of the enemy. It was their guns, not our own, we had heard nearly forty miles away at Fort Atbara. General Hunter was in command of the reconnaissance, and when General Hunter goes out to look at the enemy you may be sure he will look at him if he has to jump over his zariba to do it. Leaving the supporting battalion of infantry behind, the eight squadrons of cavalry with eight Maxims rode to the front of Mahmud's entrenchment. Last time he had made no sign of life. This time the first appearance brought out 700 cavalry. These were pushed back, but next came infantry, swarming like ants out of the zariba till the desert was black with them. They were estimated at some 1500; they opened fire, not effectively. Then came a bang to the rearward: he was firing his guns. And on each flank, meanwhile, emerged from the bush beside the entrenchment his encircling cavalry to cut ours off.

"It was Maiwand over again, only properly done," said one of the men who saw it. The Maxims opened fire on both cavalry and infantry, knocking many over, though the Dervishes were always in open order. And when it was time to go the Baggara horsemen were

by this time across our true line of retirement. Broadwood Bey ordered his troopers to charge. Behind his English leaders—the Bey himself, who always leads every attack, and Bimbashis le Gallais and Persse—the despised unwarlike fellah charged and charged home, and the Baggara lord of the Sudan split before him. Bimbashi Persse was wounded in the left forearm by a bullet fired from horseback; six troopers were killed and ten wounded. The loss of the Dervishes by lance, and especially by Maxim bullet, was reckoned at near 200.

Our seventeen casualties were a light price to pay for such a brilliant little fight, to say nothing of the information gained, and above all, the vindication of the Egyptian trooper. That the fellah was fearless of bullet and shell all knew; now he had shown his indifference to cold steel also. The cavalry mess was a hum of cheerfulness that night, and well it might be. The officers were all talking at once for joy: the troopers riding their horses down to the pool moved with a swing that was not there before. For the dogged, up-hill, back-breaking, heart-breaking work of fifteen years had come to bear fruit.

And cheerfulness spread to the whole army also: next morning—the 5th—we were off again, this time to Umdabieh, seven miles across the desert. The bush at Abadar was almost jungle — full of green sappy plants and creepers, a refreshment to camels, but a prospective hotbed of fever for men. Everybody was

getting very sick of the Atbara, which had been such a paradise of green when we first camped on it. We missed the ever-blowing breeze of the Nile: the night was a breathless oven and the day a sweaty stewpan. The Atbara seemed even getting sick of itself: day by day it dropped till now it was no river at all, but a string of shallow befouled pools. All longed for the fatherly Nile again.

So once more the squares marched forth before daylight, and black dusk lowered under the rising sun. Umdabieh was a novelty for an Atbara camp, in that a few mud huts marked the place whence the Dervishes had blotted out a village. The river was punier than ever and the belt of bush thin; lucky was the man whose quarters included a six-foot dom-palm to lay his head under. I spent both afternoons at Umdabieh chasing a patch of shadow round and round a tree. We did nothing on the 6th, for on the evening of the 7th we were to march, and to fight on Good Friday.

XVII.

THE BATTLE OF THE ATBARA.

As the first rays of sunrise glinted on the desert pebbles, the army rose up and saw that it was in front of the enemy. All night it had moved blindly, in faith. At six in the evening the four brigades were black squares on the rising desert outside the bushes of Umdabieh camp, and they set out to march. Hard gravel underfoot, full moon overhead, about them a coy horizon that seemed immeasurable yet revealed nothing, the squares tramped steadily for an hour. Then all lay down, so that the other brigades were swallowed up into the desert, and the faces of the British square were no more than shadows in the white moonbeams. The square was unlocked, and first the horses were taken down to water, then the men by half-battalions. We who had water ate some bully-beef and biscuit, put our heads on saddle-bags, rolled our bodies in blankets, and slept a little.

The next thing was a long rustle about us, stealing in upon us, urgently whispering us to rise and mount

and move. The moon had passed overhead. It was one o'clock. The square rustled into life and motion, bent forward, and started, half asleep. No man spoke, and no light showed, but the sand-muffled trampling and the moon-veiled figures forbade the fancy that it was all a dream. The shapes of lines of men—now close, now broken, and closing up again as the ground broke or the direction changed—the mounted officers, and the hushed order, "Left shoulder forward," the scrambling Maxim mules, the lines of swaying camels, their pungent smell, and the rare neigh of a horse, the other three squares like it, which we knew of but could not see,—it was just the same war-machine as we had seen all these days on parade. Only this time it was in deadly earnest, moving stealthily but massively forward towards an event that none of us could quite certainly foretell.

We marched till something after four, then halted, and the men lay down again and slept. The rest walked up and down in the gnawing cold, talking to one and another, wondering in half-voices were we there, would they give us a fight or should we find their lines empty, how would the fight be fought, and, above all, how were we to get over their zariba. For Mahmud's zariba was pictured very high, and very thick, and very prickly, which sounded awkward for the Cameron Highlanders, who were to assault it. Somebody had proposed burning it, either with war-rockets or paraffin and safety matches; somebody else

suggested throwing blankets over it, though how you throw blankets over a ten by twenty feet hedge of camel-thorn, and what you do next when you have thrown them, the inventor of the plan never explained. Others favoured scaling-ladders, apparently to take headers off on to the thorns and the enemy's spears, and even went so far as to make a few; most were for the simpler plan of just taking hold of it and pulling it apart. But how many of the men who pulled would ever get through the gap?

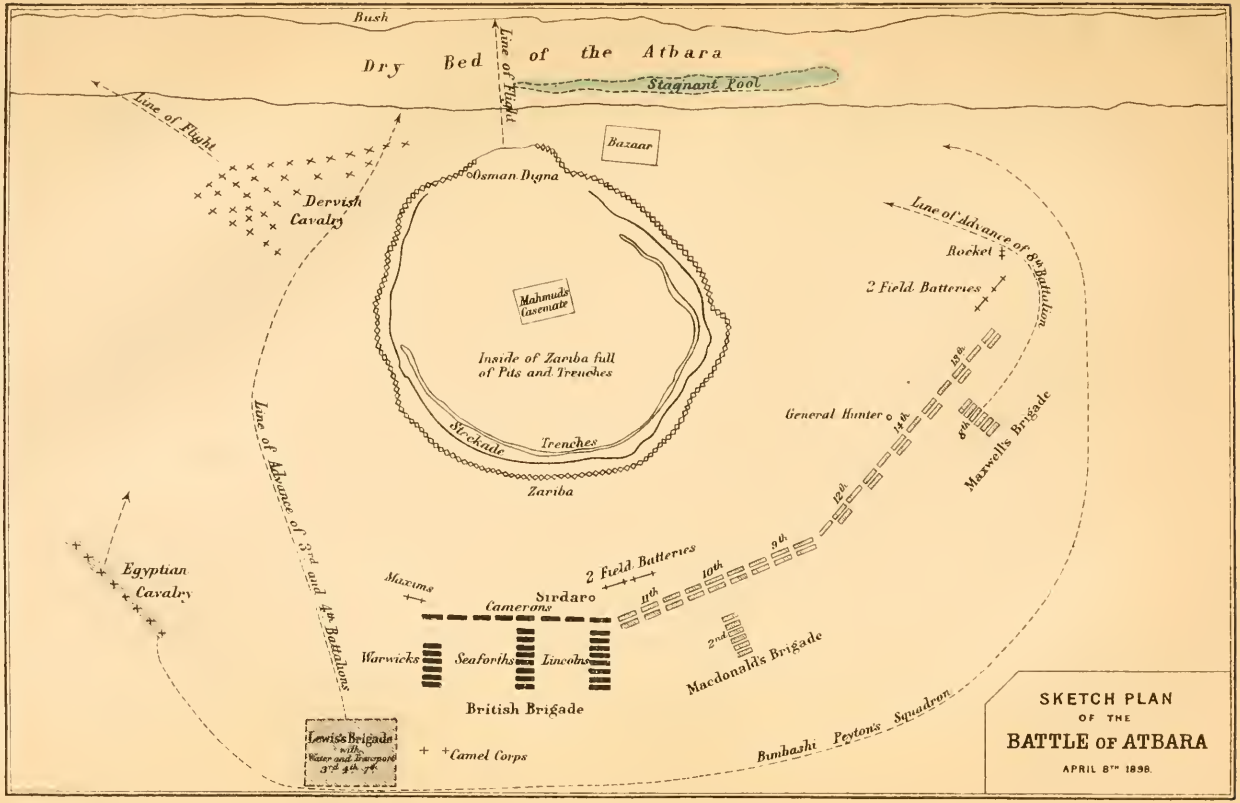
Now the sun rose behind us, and the men rose, too, and we had arrived. Bimbashi Fitton had led the four brigades in the half-light to within 200 yards of the exact positions they were to take in the action. Now, too, we saw the whole army — right of us Macdonald's, right of him, again, Maxwell's, to our left rear Lewis's in support, far away leftward of them the grey squadrons of the cavalry. The word came, and the men sprang up. The squares shifted into the fighting formations: at one impulse, in one superb sweep, near 12,000 men moved forward towards the enemy. All England and all Egypt, and the flower of the black lands beyond, Birmingham and the West Highlands, the half-regenerated children of the earth's earliest civilisation, and grinning savages from the uttermost swamps of Equatoria, muscle and machinery, lord and larrikin, Balliol and the Board School, the Sirdar's brain and the camel's back—all welded into one, the awful war machine went forward into action.

We could see their position quite well by now, about a mile and a half away—the usual river fringe of grey-green palms meeting the usual desert fringe of yellow-grey mimosa. And the smoke-grey line in front of it all must be their famous zariba. Up from it rolled a nimbus of dust, as if they were still busy at entrenching; before its right centre fluttered half a dozen flags, white and pale blue, yellow and pale chocolate. The line went on over the crunching gravel in awful silence, or speaking briefly in half-voices—went on till it was not half a mile from the flags. Then it halted. Thud! went the first gun, and phutt! came faintly back, as its shell burst on the zariba into a wreathed round cloud of just the zariba's smoky grey. I looked at my watch, and it marked 6.20. The battle that had now menaced, now evaded us for a month — the battle had begun.

Now, from the horse battery and one field battery on the right, from two batteries of Maxim-Nordenfelts on the left, just to the right front of the British, and from a war-rocket which changed over from left to right, belched a rapid, but unhurried, regular, relentless shower of destruction. The round grey clouds from shell, the round white puffs from shrapnel, the hissing splutter of rockets, flighted down methodically, and alighted on every part of the zariba and of the bush behind. A fire sprang and swarmed redly up the dried leaves of a palm-tree; before it sank

another flung up beside it, and then another. When the shelling began a few sparse shots came back; one gunner was wounded. And all over the zariba we saw dust-clothed figures strolling unconcernedly in and out, checking when a shell dropped near, and then passing contemptuously on again. The enemy's cavalry appeared galloping and forming up on our left of the zariba, threatening a charge. But tut-tut-tut-tut went the Maxims, and through glasses we could see our cavalry trembling to be at them. And the Baggara horsemen, remembering the guns that had riddled them and the squadrons that had shorn through them three days before, fell back to cover again. By now, when it had lasted an hour or more, not a man showed along the whole line, nor yet a spot of rifle smoke. All seemed empty, silent, lifeless, but for one hobbled camel, waving his neck and stupid head in helpless dumb bewilderment. Presently the edge of the storm of devastation caught him too, and we saw him no more.

An hour and twenty minutes the guns spoke, and then were silent. And now for the advance along the whole line. Maxwell's brigade on the right — 12th, 13th, and 14th Sudanese to attack and 8th Egyptian supporting—used the Egyptian attack formation,—four companies of a battalion in line and the other two in support. Macdonald,—9th, 10th, and 11th Sudanese in front and 2nd Egyptian supporting,—his space being constricted, had three companies in line


Bush
Dry Bed of the Atbara
Stagnant Pool
Line of Flight
Line of Flight
Dervish Cavalry
Bazaar
Osman Digna
Mahmuds Casemate
Inside of Zariba full of Pits and Trenches
Stockade
Trenches
Zariba
Line of Advance of 8th Battalion
Rocket
2 Field Batteries
General Hunter
Maxwell's Brigade
Line of Advance of 3rd and 4th Battalions
Egyptian Cavalry
Maxims
Camerons
Sirdaro
2 Field Batteries
Warwicks
Seaforths
Lincolns
British Brigade
Macdonald's Brigade
Lewis's Brigade with Water and Provisions
Camel Corps
Bumbashi Peyton's Squadron
SKETCH PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF ATBARA
APRIL 8TH 1898.

and three in support. The British had the Camerons in line along their whole front; then, in columns of their eight companies, the Lincolns on the right, the Seaforths in the centre, and the Warwicks, two companies short, on the left: the orders to these last were not to advance till it was certain the dervish cavalry would not charge in flank. Lewis's three-battalion brigade—3rd, 4th, and 7th Egyptian—had by this time two battalions to the British left rear and one forming square round the water-camels. All the artillery accompanied the advance.

The Camerons formed fours and moved away to the left, then turned into line. They halted and waited for the advance. They were shifted back a little to the right, then halted again. Then a staff officer galloped furiously behind their line, and shouted something in the direction of the Maxim battery. "Advance?" yelled the major, and before the answer could come the mules were up to the collar and the Maxims were up to and past the left flank of the Camerons. They stood still, waiting on the bugle—a line of khaki and dark tartan blending to purple, of flashing bayonets at the slope, and set, two-month-bearded faces strained towards the zariba. In the middle of the line shone the Union Jack.

The bugle sang out the advance. The pipes screamed battle, and the line started forward, like a ruler drawn over the tussock-broken sand. Up a low ridge they moved forward: when would the Dervishes fire? The

Camerons were to open from the top of the ridge, only 300 yards short of the zariba; up and up, forward and forward: when would they fire? Now the line crested the ridge—the men knelt down. "Volley-firing by sections"—and crash it came. It came from both sides, too, almost the same instant. Wht-t, wht-t, wht-t piped the bullets overhead: the line knelt very firm, and aimed very steady, and crash crash, crash they answered it.

O! A cry more of dismayed astonishment than of pain, and a man was up on his feet and over on his back, and the bearers were dashing in from the rear. He was dead before they touched him, but already they found another for the stretcher. Then bugle again, and up and on: the bullets were swishing and lashing now like rain on a pond. But the line of khaki and purple tartan never bent nor swayed; it just went slowly forward like a ruler. The officers at its head strode self-containedly—they might have been on the hill after red-deer; only from their locked faces turned unswervingly towards the bullets could you see that they knew and had despised the danger. And the unkempt, unshaven Tommies, who in camp seemed little enough like Covenanters or Ironsides, were now quite transformed. It was not so difficult to go on—the pipes picked you up and carried you on—but it was difficult not to hurry; yet whether they aimed or advanced they did it orderly, gravely, without speaking. The bullets had whispered to raw

youngsters in one breath the secret of all the glories of the British Army.

Forward and forward, more swishing about them and more crashing from them. Now they were moving, always without hurry, down a gravelly incline. Three men went down without a cry at the very foot of the Union Jack, and only one got to his feet again; the flag shook itself and still blazed splendidly. Next, a supremely furious gust of bullets, and suddenly the line stood fast. Before it was a loose low hedge of dry camel-thorn—the zariba, the redoubtable zariba. That it? A second they stood in wonder, and then, "Pull it away," suggested somebody. Just half-a-dozen tugs, and the impossible zariba was a gap and a scattered heap of brushwood. Beyond is a low stockade and trenches; but what of that? Over and in! Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!

Now the inside suddenly sprang to life. Out of the earth came dusty, black, half-naked shapes, running, running and turning to shoot, but running away. And in a second the inside was a wild confusion of Highlanders, purple tartan and black-green, too, for the Seaforths had brought their perfect columns through the teeth of the fire, and were charging in at the gap. Inside that zariba was the most astounding labyrinth ever seen out of a nightmare. It began with a stockade and a triple trench. Beyond that the bush was naturally thick with palm stem and mimosa-thorn and halfa-grass. But, besides, it was as full of

holes as any honeycomb, only far less regular. There was a shelter-pit for every animal—here a donkey tethered down in a hole just big enough for itself and its master; beside it a straw hut with a tangle of thorn; yawning a yard beyond, a larger trench, chokefull of tethered camels and dead or dying men. There was no plan or system in it, only mere confusion of stumbling-block and pitfall. From holes below and hillocks above, from invisible trenches to right and innocent tukls to left, the bewildered bullets curved, and twisted, and dodged. It took some company-leading; for the precise formations that the bullets only stiffened were loosening now. But the officers were equal to it: each picked his line and ran it, and if a few of his company were lost—kneeling by green-faced comrades or vaguely bayoneting along with a couple of chance companions—they kept the mass centred on the work in hand.

For now began the killing. Bullet and bayonet and butt, the whirlwind of Highlanders swept over. And by this time the Lincolns were in on the right, and the Maxims, galloping right up to the stockade, had withered the left, and the Warwicks, the enemy's cavalry definitely gone, were volleying off the blacks as your beard comes off under a keen razor. Farther and farther they cleared the ground—cleared it of everything like a living man, for it was left carpeted thick enough with dead. Here was a trench; bayonet that man. Here a little straw tukl; warily round

to the door, and then a volley. Now in column through this opening in the bushes; then into line, and drop those few desperately firing shadows among the dry stems beyond. For the running blacks—poor heroes—still fired, though every second they fired less and ran more. And on, on the British stumbled and slew, till suddenly there was unbroken blue overhead, and a clear drop underfoot. The river! And across the trickle of water the quarter-mile of dry sand-bed was a fly-paper with scrambling spots of black. The pursuers thronged the bank in double line, and in two minutes the paper was still black-spotted, only the spots scrambled no more. "Now that," panted the most pessimistic senior captain in the brigade—"now I call that a very good fight."

Cease fire! Word and whistle and voice took a little time to work into hot brains; then sudden silence. Again, hurrah, hurrah, hurrah! It had lasted forty minutes; and nobody was quite certain whether it had seemed more like two minutes or two years. All at once there came a roar of fire from the left; the half-sated British saw the river covered with a new swarm of flies, only just in time to see them stop still as the others. This was Lewis's half-brigade of Egyptians at work. They had stood the heavy fire that sought them as if there were no such things as wounds or death; now they had swept down leftward of the zariba, shovelled the enemy into the river-bed, and shot them down. Bloodthirsty? Count up the

Egyptians murdered by Mahdism, and then say so if you will.

Meanwhile, all the right-hand part of the zariba was alive with our blacks. They had been seen from the British line as it advanced, ambling and scrambling over rise and dip, firing heavily, as they were ordered to, and then charging with the cold bayonet, as they lusted to. They were in first, there cannot be a doubt. Their line formation turned out a far better one for charging the defences than the British columns, which were founded on an exaggerated expectation of the difficulty of the zariba, and turned out a trifle unhandy. And if the zariba had been as high and thick as the Bank of England, the blacks and their brigaded Egyptians would have slicked through it and picked out the thorns after the cease fire. As against that, they lost more men than the British, for their advance was speedier and their volleys less deadly than the Camerons' pelting destruction that drove through every skull raised an inch to aim.

But never think the blacks were out of hand. They attacked fast, but they attacked steadily, and kept their formation to the last moment there was anything to form against. The battle of the Atbara has definitely placed the blacks—yes, and the once contemned Egyptians—in the ranks of the very best troops in the world. When it was over their officers were ready to cry with joy and pride. And the blacks, every one of whom would beamingly charge the

bottomless pit after his Bey, were just as joyous and proud of their officers. They stood about among the dead, their faces cleft with smiles, shaking and shaking each other's hands. A short shake, then a salute, another shake and another salute, again and again and again, with the head-carving smile never narrowed an instant. Then up to the Bey and the Bimbashis—mounted now, but they had charged afoot and clear ahead, as is the recognised wont of all chiefs of the fighting Sudan when they intend to conquer or die with their men — and more handshakes and more salutes. "*Dushman quaïss kitir*," ran round from grin to grin; "very good fight, very good fight."

Now fall in, and back to the desert outside. And unless you are congenitally amorous of horrors, don't look too much about you. Black spindle-legs curled up to meet red-gimbleted black faces, donkeys headless and legless, or sieves of shrapnel, camels with necks writhed back on to their humps, rotting already in pools of blood and bile-yellow water, heads without faces, and faces without anything below, cobwebbed arms and legs, and black skins grilled to crackling on smouldering palm-leaf,—don't look at it. Here is the Sirdar's white star and crescent; here is the Sirdar, who created this battle, this clean-jointed, well-oiled, smooth-running, clockwork-perfect masterpiece of a battle. Not a flaw, not a check, not a jolt; and not a fleck on its shining success. Once more, hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!

XVIII.

LOSSES AND GAINS.

It was over. It was a brilliant, crushing victory, and the dervish army was destroyed: so much everybody knew. But no more. The fight had gone forward in a whirl: you could see men fall about you, and knew that there must be losses on our side; but whether they were 100 or 1000 it was impossible even to guess. Then, as the khaki figures began to muster outside the zariba, it was good to meet friend after friend—dusty, sweaty, deep-breathing, putting up a grimed revolver—untouched. It was good to see the Tommies looking with new adoration to the comfort of their rifles, drunk with joy and triumph, yet touched with a sudden awe in the presence of something so much more nakedly elemental than anything in their experience. Two hours had sobered them from boys to men. Just then there was nothing in the world or under it to which the army would not have been equal. Yet, in that Godlike moment, I fancy every man in the force thought first of home.

Now to see what we had done and suffered. And first, for a new fillip to exultation, Mahmud was a prisoner. Some soldiers of the 10th Sudanese had found him as they swept through the zariba—found him sitting on his carpet, his weapons at his side, after the manner of defeated war-chiefs who await death. He was not killed, and presently he was brought bare-headed before the Sirdar—a tall, dark-brown complexioned man of something between thirty and forty. He wore loose drawers and a gibba — the dervish uniform which still mimics the patched shirt of the Mahdi, but embroiders it with gold. His face was of the narrow-cheeked, high-foreheaded type, for he is a pure-bred Arab: his expression was cruel, but high. He looked neither to right nor to left, but strode up to the Sirdar with his head erect.

"Are you the man Mahmud?" asked the Sirdar.

"Yes; I am Mahmud, and I am the same as you." He meant commander-in-chief.

"Why did you come to make war here?"

"I came because I was told,—the same as you."

Mahmud was removed in custody; but everybody liked him the better for looking at his fate so straight and defiantly.

But small leisure had anybody to pity Mahmud: the pity was all wanted for our own people. Hardly had the Camerons turned back from the river-bank when it flew through the companies that two of the finest officers in the regiment were killed. Captains

Urquhart and Findlay had both been killed leading their men over the trenches. The first had only joined the battalion at Ras Hudi; he had newly passed the Staff College, and only two days before had been gazetted major; after less than a fortnight's campaigning he was dead. Captain Findlay's fortune was yet more pathetic: he had been married but a month or two before, and the widowed bride was not eighteen. He was a man of a singularly simple, sincere, and winning nature, and the whole force lamented his loss. Probably his great height — for he stood near 6 feet 6 inches — had attracted attack besides his daring: he was one of the first, some said the first, to get over the stockade, and had killed two of the enemy with his sword before he dropped. Both he and Captain Urquhart had got too far ahead of their men to be protected by rifle fire; but they were followed, and they were avenged.

Second-Lieutenant Gore of the Seaforths was also killed while storming the trenches: he had not yet, I think, completed one year's service. Among the wounded officers were Colonel Verner of the Lincolns and Colonel Murray of the Seaforths, both slightly: the latter was very coolly tied up by Mr Scudamore, the 'Daily News' correspondent, inside the zariba under a distracting fire. More severely hit were Major Napier (Camerons) and Captain Baillie (Seaforths): both were excellent officers and good companions; both afterwards died. Besides these the

Seaforths had three officers wounded, the Lincolns two, and the Warwicks one. Most of the casualties occurred in crossing the trenches, which were just wide enough for a man to stand in and deep enough to cover him completely. As our men passed over, the blacks fired and stabbed upwards; most of the wounds were therefore below the belt.

The Seaforths happened to have most officers hit among the four battalions of the British brigade; as they advanced in column against the hottest part of the entrenchment, this was quite comprehensible. But the Camerons, who led the whole brigade in line, lost most in non-commissioned officers and men. Counting officers, they had 15 killed and 46 wounded. The Seaforths lost (again with officers) 6 killed and 27 wounded; the Lincolns 1 killed and 18 wounded; and the Warwicks 2 killed and 12 wounded. Of these several afterwards died. Staff-Sergeant Wyeth, A.S.C., and Private Cross of the Camerons, were both mentioned in despatches. The first carried the Union Jack, which was three times pierced; the other was General Gatacre's bugler. Wyeth was severely wounded, and Cross presently seized with terrible dysentery: both died within a few days. Private Cross had bayoneted a huge black who attacked the general at the zariba, and it was said he was to be recommended for the V.C. A similar feat was done by a colour-sergeant of the Camerons, whose major was entangled in the stockade, and must have been

killed. The colour-sergeant never even mentioned the service to his officer, who only discovered it by accident. Of course there were scores of hair-breadth escapes, as there must be in any close engagement. One piper was killed with seven bullets in his body; a corporal in another regiment received seven in his clothing, one switchbacking in and out of the front of his tunic, and not one pierced the skin. Another man picked up a brass box inside the zariba, and put it in his breast pocket, thinking it might come in useful for tobacco. Next instant a bullet hit it and glanced away. The Maxim battery had no casualties — very luckily, for it was up with the firing-line all the time; probably nobody could stand up against it. Altogether the British brigade lost 24 killed and 104 wounded, of whom perhaps 20 died.

The Egyptian loss was heavier. They had advanced more quickly, and by reason of their line formation had got to work in the trenches sooner than the British; but they had not kept down the enemy's fire with such splendid success. The 11th Sudanese, which had the honour of having been one of the first inside the zariba, lost very heavily—108 killed and wounded out of less than 700. The total casualties were 57 killed, and 4 British and 16 native officers, 2 British non-commissioned officers, and 365 non-commissioned officers and men wounded. The white officers were Walter Bey and Shekleton Bey, com-

manding the 9th and 14th Sudanese respectively, and Bimbashis Walsh and Harley of the 12th Sudanese. The former lost his leg. The instructors were Sergeants Handley of the 9th and Hilton of the 12th. Thus, out of five white men, the 12th had three hit. More officers would probably have been hit, but that none except the generals were allowed to ride. Generals Hunter, Macdonald, and Maxwell all rode over the trenches at the head of their men.

The total of casualties, therefore, works out at 81 killed and 493 wounded, out of a strength probably a little short of 12,000. It was not a wholly bloodless victory, but beyond question it was a wonderfully cheap one. For the results gained could not be overstated: Mahmud's army was as if it had never been. These two short hours of shell and bullet and bayonet had erased it from the face of the earth.

A scribe taken prisoner at Shendi said that the force which marched north had been officially reported to the Khalifa as 18,941 fighting men. The report may or may not have been true: in any case Mahmud had not this strength on Good Friday. Some had been shot from the gunboats or by the 4th Battalion on Shebaliya Island as they came down the river; some had been killed in the skirmishes at Khor Abadar, or in General Hunter's reconnaissances outside Nakheila. Many had deserted. Mahmud himself said that his strength on the 8th was 12,000 infantry and 4000 cavalry, with 10 guns. Some days afterwards he

asserted that his cavalry had left him the day before, but that was the brag of returning confidence. We all saw his cavalry.

To be sure, the cavalry did get away; and Osman Digna, who never fights to a finish, got away with them. The cavalry did nothing and behaved badly, which is significant. For the cavalry were Baggara—the cattle-owning Arabs of the Khalifa's own tribe, transplanted by him from Darfur to the best lands round Omdurman. They are the lords of the Sudan—and ingloriously they ran away. On the other hand, the Jehadia, the enlisted black infantry, fought most nobly. If their fire seemed bad to us, what hell must ours have been to them! First an hour and a half of shell and shrapnel—the best ammunition, perfectly aimed and timed, from some of the deadliest field-pieces in the world; then volley after volley of blunted Lee-Metford and of Martini bullets, delivered coolly at 300 yards and less, with case and Maxim fire almost point-blank. The guns fired altogether 1500 rounds, mostly shrapnel; the Camerons averaged 34 rounds per man. A black private, asked by his Bimbashi how many rounds he fired, replied, "Only 15." "Why, you're not much of a man," said his officer. "Ah, but then, Effendim," he eagerly excused himself, "I had to carry a stretcher besides." If the black bearer-parties fired 15 rounds, what must the firing-line have done! Mahmud said that his people had only laughed at the shrapnel, but that the infantry fire was *Sheitun tam-*

am — the very devil. Mahmud, however, admitted that, having been round the position, he lay close in his stockade during the bombardment; and as his stockade, or casemate, was the strongest corner in the place, he can hardly speak for the rest. And I saw scores and hundreds of dead goats and sheep, donkeys and camels, lying in pits in the part of the zariba stormed by the British. Now Thomas Atkins does not kill animals needlessly, even when his blood is hottest. The beasts therefore must have been killed by shrapnel; and if so many beasts, we may presume that many men, no better protected, were killed too. And so, I am afraid, unavoidably, were many women, for the zariba was full of them.

Yet the black Jehadia stood firm in their trenches through the infernal minutes, and never moved till those devilish white Turks and their black cousins came surging, yelling, shooting, and bayoneting right on top of them. Many stayed where they were to die, only praying that they might kill one first. Those who ran, ran slowly, turning doggedly to fire. The wounded, as usual, took no quarter; they had to be killed lest they should kill. For an example of their ferocious heroism, I cite a little, black, pot-bellied boy of ten or so. He was standing by his dead father, and when the attackers came up, he picked up an elephant-gun and fired. He missed, and the kicking monster half-killed him; but he had done what he could.

In the zariba itself Bimbashi Watson, A.D.C. to the Sirdar, counted over 2000 dead before he was sick of it. There were others left: trench after trench was found filled with them. A few were killed outside the zariba; a great many were shot down in crossing the river-bed. Altogether 3000 men must have been killed on the spot; among them were nearly all the Emirs, including Wad Bishara, who was Governor of Dongola in 1896. But this was not half the significance of the victory. Now you began to comprehend the perfection of the Sirdar's strategy. If he had waited for Mahmud on the Nile, fugitives could have escaped up-stream. If he had waited low down the Atbara, they could still have got across to the Nile. But by giving battle up at Nakheila, he gave the escaping dervish thirty miles of desert to struggle across before he could reach water and such safety as the patrolling gunboats would allow him. A few may have got back to Omdurman — if they dared; some certainly were afterwards picked off by the gunboats in the attempt. Others fled up the Atbara; many were picked up by the cavalry through the afternoon: some got as far as Adarama or even near Kassala, and were killed by the friendly levies there. For the wounded the desert was certain death. In a word, the finest dervish army was not. Retreat was impossible, pursuit superfluous; defeat was annihilation.

XIX.

THE TRIUMPH.

"Catch 'em alive O! Catch 'em alive O!
If they once gets on the gum
They'll pop off to kingdom come;
Catch 'em alive O! Catch 'em alive O!
For I am the flyest man around the town."

Back swung the blacks from battle. The band of the Twelfth specialises on Mr Gus Elen: it had not been allowed to play him during the attack—only the regimental march till the bandsmen were tired of it, and then each instrument what it liked—but now the air quoted came in especially apposite.

They had caught 'em alive O. Hardly one but had slung behind him a sword or a spine-headed spear, a curly knife, or a spiky club, or some other quaint captured murdering-iron. Some had supplemented their Martini with a Remington, an inch calibre elephant-gun with spherical iron bullets or conical shells, a regulation Italian magazine rifle, a musket of Mahomet Ali's first expedition, a Martini of '85, or

a Tower Rifle of '56 with a handful of the cartridges the sepoys declined to bite. Some had suits of armour tucked inside them; one or two, Saracen helmets slung to their belts. Over one tarbush waved a diadem of black ostrich plumes. The whole regiment danced with spear-headed banners blue and white, with golden letters thereupon promising victory to the faithful. And behind half-a-dozen men tugged at one of Mahmud's ten captured guns; they meant to ask the Sirdar if they might keep it.

The band stopped, and a hoarse gust of song flung out. From references to Allah you might presume it a song of thanksgiving. Then, tramp, tramp, a little silence, and the song came again with an abrupt exultant roar. The thin-legged, poker-backed shadows jerked longer and longer over the rough desert shingle. They had been going from six the bitter night before, and nothing to eat since, and Nakheila has been 111° in the shade, with the few spots of shade preoccupied by corpses. That being so, and remembering that the British and wounded had to follow, the Second Brigade condescended to a mere four miles an hour. And "By George! you know," said the Bey, "they're lovely; they're rippers. I've seen Sikhs and I've seen Gurkhas, and these are good enough for me. This has been the happiest day of my life. I wasn't happier the day I got the D.S.O. than I've been to-day."

It was the happiest day of a good many lives. But forty all but sleepless hours on your feet or in your

saddle tell on the system in a climate that seesaws between a grill and an ice-machine. By the time I got in I was very contented to tie my horse by some whity-brown grass and tumble to sleep with my head on the saddle. At midnight dinner was ready; then solid sleep again. Awaking at five, I found an officer of Colonel Lewis's brigade in his spurs and demanding tea. He had got in from Nakheila but two hours before, which brought his fast well over twenty-four hours and his vigil to close on forty-eight.

For it isn't everybody that tramps back into camp from battle with bands and praises of Allah. Some stay for good, and it pricks you in your joy when you catch yourself thinking of that swift and wicked injustice. Why him? Also some come home on their backs, or wrenched and moaning in cacolets bumping on baggage-camels. Lewis's never-weary, never-hungry Egyptians had been bringing in the wounded—carrying stretchers across twelve black miles of desert at something over a mile an hour. And General Hunter, who in the morning had been galloping bare-headed through the bullets, waving on the latest-raised battalion of blacks, now chose to spend the night playing guide to the crawling convoy. General Hunter could not do an unsoldierlike act if he tried.

It was difficult after all to be sorry for most of the men who were hit, they were so aggressively not sorry for themselves. The afternoon of the fight they lay in a little palm-grove northward of the zariba under

tents of blanket—a double row of khaki and grey flannel shirt, with more blankets below them and above. One face was covered with a handkerchief; one man gasped constantly—just the gasp of the child that wants sympathy and doesn't like to ask for it; one face was a blank mask of yellow white clay. The rest, but for the red-splashed bandages and the importunate reek of iodoform, might have been lying down for a siesta. Their principal anxiety — these bearded boys who had never fired a shot off the range before — was to learn what size of deed they had helped to do to-day. "A grahn' fight? The best ever fought in the Sudan? Eh, indeed, sir; ah'm vara glahd to hear ye say so." "Now, 'ow would you sy, sir, this 'd be alongside them fights they've been 'avin' in India?" "Bigger, eh? Ah! Will it be in tomorrow's pyper? Well, they'll be talkin' about us at 'ome." It was not the unhappiest day in these men's lives either.

The morrow of the fight brought a quiet morning —for all but correspondents, who had now to pay for many days of idle luxury—and in the afternoon we all marched off to the old camp at Abadar. Thence on Sunday the brigades were to march to their old quarters—British to Darmali, 1st to Berber, 2nd to Essillem, and 3rd to Fort Atbara. Everybody was agasp for the moving air and moving water of the Nile. But the British got very late into camp on Saturday night, and there was no longer any hurry,

as there was no longer any enemy. So instead we had an Easter Sunday church-parade—men standing reverently four-square in the sand; in the middle the padre, square-shouldered and square-jawed, with putties and square boots showing under the surplice; a couple of drums for lectern, and "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory," for text.

On Monday, the 11th, the Sirdar rode into Fort Atbara, and the Egyptian brigades followed him. The British marched to Hudi, and thence across the desert to Darmali, their summer quarters. There began to be talk about leave. But before the campaign closed there was one inspiriting morning—the return to Berber.

It was more like a Roman triumph than anything you have ever seen—like in its colour, its barbarism, its intoxicating arrogance. The Sirdar reached Berber an hour or so after sunrise; the garrison—Macdonald's brigade—had bivouacked outside. The Sirdar rode up to the once more enfranchised town, and was there received by a guard of honour of the 1st Egyptians, who had held the town during the campaign. The guns thundered a salute. Then slowly he started to ride down the wide main street—tall, straight, and masterful in his saddle. Hunter Pasha at his side, his staff and his flag behind him, then Lewis Bey and some of his officers from Fort Atbara, then a clanking escort of cavalry. At the gate he passed under a triumphal arch, and all the street was Vene-

tian masts and bunting and coloured paper, and soldiers of the 1st presenting arms, and men and women and children shrieking shrill delight.

Well might they; for they have tried both rules, and they prefer that of Egypt. So they pressed forward and screamed "Lu, lu," as they saw returning the Sirdar and their Excellencies, these men of fair face and iron hand, just to the weak and swiftly merciless to the proud. And when these had passed they pressed forward still more eagerly. Farther behind, in a clear space, came one man alone, his hands tied behind his back. Mahmud! Mahmud, holding his head up and swinging his thighs in a swaggering stride—but Mahmud a prisoner, beaten, powerless. When the people of Berber saw that, they were convinced. It was not a lie, then: the white men had conquered indeed. And many a dark-skinned woman pressed forward to call Mahmud "Dog" to his face: it was Mahmud, last year, who massacred the Jaalin at Metemmeh.

By this time the Sirdar had come almost to the bazaar, at the north end of the town; and there was a small platform with an awning. He dismounted, and so did the officers; then took his stand, and in came the troops. At their head the brigadier—"old Mac," bronzed and grizzled, who has lived in camp and desert and battlefield these twenty years on end. Then the blacks, straight as the spears they looted at Nakheila, quivering with pride in their officers and

their own manhood—yet not a whit prouder than when they marched out a month before. Then the cavalry and the guns and the camel-corps—every arm of the victorious force. And Berber stood by and wondered and exulted. The band crashed and the people yelled. "Lu-u-u, lu-u-u-u" piped the black women, and you could see the brave, savage, simple hearts of the black men bounding to the appeal. And the Sirdar and General Hunter and the others stood above all, calm and commanding; below Bey and Bimbashi led battalion or squadron or battery, in undisturbed self-reliance. You may call the show barbaric if you like: it was meant for barbarians. The English gentleman, if you like, is half barbarian too. That is just the value of him. Here was this little knot of white men among these multitudes of black and brown, swaying them with a word or the wave of a hand upraised. Burned from the sun and red-eyed from the sand, carrying fifteen years' toil with straight backs, bearing living wounds in elastic bodies. They, after all, were the finest sight of the whole triumph—so fearless, so tireless, so confident.

XX.

EGYPT OUT OF SEASON.

THERE was no difference in Port Said. Ships want coal in July as in December: the black dust hung over the Canal in sullen fog, and the black demons of the pit wailed as they tripped from lighter to deck under their baskets. In the hotel the Levantine clerks and agents took their breakfast in white ducks under a punkah, but that was all the change. Black island of coal, jabbering island of beggars and touts, forlorn island cranked in by sea and canal and swamp and sand, Port Said in summer was not appreciably more God-forsaken than in the full season.

Ismailia was not appreciably deader than usual. If anything, with half-a-dozen French summer gowns and a French bicycle club, in blue and scarlet jerseys, doing monkey-tricks in front of the station, it was a shade more alive.

In Cairo came the awful change. Cairo the fashionable, the brilliant, was a desolation. When you run into the station in the season, the platform is lined

with names of hotels on the gold-laced caps of under-porters: you can hardly step out for swarms of Arabs, who fight for your baggage. On the night of July 12, the platform showed gaunt and large and empty. The streets were hardly better—a few list-less Arabs in the square outside the station, and then avenue on avenue of silent darkness.

By daylight Cairo looked like a ball-room the morning after. One hotel was shamelessly making up a rather battered face against next season. The verandah of Shepheard's, where six months ago you could not move for tea-tables, nor hear the band for the buzz of talk, was quite empty and lifeless; only one perspiring waiter hinted that this was a hotel. The Continental, the centre of Cairene fashion, had a whole wing shuttered up; the mirrors in the great hall were blind with whiting, and naked suites of bed-room furniture camped out in the great dining-room. Some shops were shut; the rest wore demi-toilettes of shutter and blind; the dozing shopkeepers seemed half-resentful that anybody should wish to buy in such weather. As for scarabs and necklaces and curi-osities of Egypt, they no longer pretended to think that any sane man could give money for such things. As you looked out from the Citadel, Cairo seemed dazed under the sun; the very Pyramids looked as if they were taking a holiday.

All that was no more than you expected: you knew that no tourists came to Egypt in July. But native

Egypt was out of season too. The streets that clacked with touts and beggars, that jingled with every kind of hawker's rubbish—you passed along them down a vista of closed jalousies and saw not a soul, heard not a sound. The natives must be somewhere, only where? A few you saw at road-making, painting, and the like jobs of an off-season. But every native was dull, listless, hanging from his stalk, half dead. Eyes were languid and lustreless: the painter's head drooped and swayed from side to side, and the brush almost fell from his lax fingers. In the narrow bevel of shadow left under a wall by the high sun, flat on back or face, open-mouthed, half asleep, half fainting, gasped Arab Cairo—the parasite of the tourist in his holiday, the workman leaving his work, donkey-boy and donkey flat and panting together.

Well might they gasp and pant; for the air of Cairo was half dead too. You might drive in it at night and feel it whistle round you, but it did not refresh you. You might draw it into your lungs, but it did not fill them. The air had no quality in it, no body: it was thin, used up, motionless, too limp to live in. The air of August London is stale and close, poor; exaggerate it fifty-fold and you have the air of July Cairo. You wake up at night dull and flaccid and clammy with sweat, less refreshed than when you lay down. You live on what sleep you can pilfer during the hour of dawn. As you drive home at night

you envy the dark figure in a galabeah stretched on the pavement of Kasr-en-Nil bridge; there only in Cairo can you feel a faint stirring in the air.

To put all in one word, Egypt lacks its Nile. The all-fathering river is at his lowest and weakest. In places he is nearly dry, and what water he can give the cracked fields is pale, green, unfertile. He was beginning to rise now, slowly; presently would come the flood and the brown manuring water. The night wind would blow strongly over his broadened bosom, the green would spring out of the mud, and Egypt would be alive again.

Only in one place was she alive yet—and that was the Continental Hotel. Here all day sat and came and went clean-limbed young men in flannels, and at dinner-time the terrace was cool with white mess-jackets. Outside was the only crowd of natives in Cairo—a thick line of Arabs squatting by the opposite wall, nursing testimonials earned or bought, cooks and valets and grooms—waiting to be hired to go up the Nile. Up at the citadel they would show you the great black up-standing 40-pounder guns with which they meant to breach Khartum. Out at Abbassieh the 21st Lancers were changing their troop-horses for lighter Syrians and country-breds. The barrack-yard of Kasr-en-Nil was yellow with tents, and under a breathless afternoon sun the black-belted Rifle Brigade marched in from the station to fill them. The wilted

Arabs hardly turned their heads at the band; the Rifles held their shoulders square and stepped out with a rattle.

The Egyptian may feel the sun; the Englishman must stand up and march in it. You see it is his country, and he must set an example. And seeing Egypt thus Nileless, bloodless, you felt more than ever that he must lose no time in taking into firm fingers the keys of the Nile above Khartum.

XXI.

GOING UP.

On the half-lit Cairo platform servants flung agonised arms round brothers' necks, kissed them all over, and resigned themselves to the horrors of the Sudan. Inside the stuffy carriages was piled a confusion of bags and bundles, of helmet-cases and sword-cases, of canvas buckets cooling soda, and canvas bottles cooling water,—of Beys and Bimbashis returning from leave. It was rather like the special train that takes boys back to school. A few had been home—but the Sirdar does not like to have too many of his officers seen in Piccadilly; it doesn't look well. Some had been to Constantinople, to Brindisi and back for the sea, to San Stefano, the Ostend of Egypt, to Cairo and no farther. Like schoolboys, they had all been wild to get away, and now they were all wild to get back. Thank the Lord, no more Cairo—sweat all the night instead of sleep, and mosquitos tearing you to pieces. Give me the night-breeze of the desert and the clean sand of the Sudan.

But first we had to tunnel through the filthiest seventeen hours in Egypt. The servants had spread our blankets on the bare, hard leather seats of the boxes that Egyptian railways call sleeping-cars; a faint grateful air began to glide in through the windows. And then came in the dust. Without haste —had it not seventeen hours before it?—it streamed through every chink in a thick coffee-coloured cloud. It piled itself steadily over the seats and the floor, the bags and bundles and cases; it built up walls of mud round the soda-water, and richly larded the half-cold chicken for the morrow's lunch. We choked ourselves to sleep; in the morning we choked no longer, the lungs having reconciled themselves to breathe powdered Egypt. Our faces were layered with coffee-colour, thicker than the powder on the latest fashionable lady's nose. Hair and moustaches, eyebrows and eyelashes, and every corner of sun-puckered eyes, were lost and levelled in rich friable soil. And from the caked, sun-riven fields of thirsty Egypt fresh clouds rose and rolled and settled, till in all the train you saw, smelt, touched, tasted nothing but dust.

At Luxor came the first novelty. When I came down the practicable railway stopped short there: now a narrow-gauge railway ran through to Assuan. It is not quite comprehensible why the gauge should have been broken,—perhaps to make sure that the line should be kept exclusively military. It can easily be altered afterwards to the Egyptian gauge;

meanwhile the journey is done by train in twelve hours against the post-boat's thirty-six.

Assuan was the same as ever. Shellal, at the head of the cataract, the great forwarding station for the South, was the same, only much more so. The high bank was one solid rampart of ammunition and beef, biscuit and barley; it clanged and tinkled all night through with parts of steamers and sections of barges. Stern-wheelers came down from the South, turned about, took in fuel, hooked on four barges alongside, and thudded off up-river again. No hurry; no rest. And here was the same Commandant as when I came up before. He had had one day in Cairo; his hair was two shades greyer; he was still being reviled by everybody who did not have everything he wanted sent through at five seconds' notice; he was still drawing unmercifully on body and brain, and ripping good years out of his life to help to conquer the Sudan. Victory over dervishes may be won in an hour, may be cheap; victory over the man-eating Sudan—the victory of the railway, the steamer, the river—means months and years of toil and so much of his life lost, to every man that helps to win it.

The steamer tinkered at her fourteen-year-old boiler for twenty hours, and then trudged off towards Halfa. She did the 200 odd miles in 77 hours, so that it would have been almost as quick to have gone by road in a wheelbarrow. But then the nuggars alongside were heavy with many sacks of barley, to be

turned later into cavalry chargers. Moreover, on the second morning, rounding a bend, we suddenly saw a line drawn diagonally across the river. All the water below the line was green; all above it was brown And the brown pressed slowly, thickly forward, driving the green before it. This was the Nile-flood,—the rich Abyssinian mud that comes down Blue Nile and Atbara. When this should have floated down below the cataract, Egypt would have water again, air again, bread again, life again. And the Sudan would have gunboats and barges of cartridges and gyassas of food and fodder, and the Sirdar thundering at the gates of Khartum.

Next windy, green-treed Halfa—only this time it was less windy than last, and the trees, though still the greenest on the Nile, were not so green. Last time there had been melons growing on the sandy eyot opposite the commanderia, and the eyot had grown higher daily; this time it was all dry sand and no melons,—only it grew daily smaller in the lapping water. But spring or summer, Halfa's business is the same—the railway and the recruits. That line was finished now up to the Atbara, and the foreshore was clear of rails and sleepers. But instead they were forcing through stores and supplies, choking the trucks to the throat with them. The glut had only begun when the line reached its terminus; it would be over before the new white brigade came through. Everything in the Sirdar's Expedition has

its own time — first material, then transport, then troops; and woe unto him who is behind his time.

The platform was black and brown, blue and white with a great crowd of natives. For drawn up in line opposite the waiting trucks were rigid squads of black figures in the familiar brown jersey and blue putties, and on the tarbushes the badges, green, black, red, yellow, blue, and white, of each of the six Sudanese battalions. Thin-shanked Shillúks and Dinkas from the White Nile, stubby Beni-Helba from Darfur and the West,—they were just the figures and huddled savage-smiling faces that we had last seen at Berber. Only—the last time we had seen those particular blacks they were shooting at us. Every one had begun life as a dervish, and had been taken prisoner at or after the Atbara. Now, not four months after, here they were, erect and soldierly, with at least the rudiments of shooting, on their way to fight their former masters, and very glad to do it. They knew when they were well off. Before they were slaves, half-clothed, half-fed, half-armed, good to lose their women at Shendi, and to stay in the trenches of Nakheila when the Baggara ran away. Now they are free soldiers, well paid, well clothed, well fed, with weapons they can trust and officers who charge ahead and would rather die than leave them. Their women—who, after all, only preceded them into the Egyptian army—are as safe from recapture at Halfa as you are in the Strand. No wonder the blacks grinned merrily as

they bundled up on to the trucks, and the women lu-lu-lued them off with the head-stabbing shrillness of certain victory.

The first time I travelled on the S.M.R. I enjoyed a berth in the large saloons; the second time in one of the small saloons; this time it was a truck. But the truck, after all, was the most comfortable of the three. It was a long double-bogie, with a plank roof, and canvas curtains that you could let down when the sun came in, and eight angarebs screwed to the floor. Therein six men piled their smaller baggage, and set up their tables, and ate and drank and slept and yawned forty-eight hours to the Atbara. Of all the three months' changes in the Sudan, here were the most stupefying. Abeidieh, where the new gunboats had been put together, had grown from a hut and two tents to a railway station and triangle and watering-plant and engine-shed, and rows of seemly mud-barracks, soon to be hospital. But the Atbara was even more utterly transformed. I had left it a fortified camp; I found it a kind of Nine Elms. Lewis Bey's house, then the pride of the Sudan, now cowered in the middle of a huge mud-walled station-yard. Boxes and barrels and bags climbed up and overshadowed and choked it. Ammunition and stores, food and fodder—the journey had been a crescendo of them, but this was the fortissimo. You wandered about among the streets of piles that towered overhead, and lost yourself in munitions of war. Along

the Nile bank, where two steamers together had been a rarity, lay four. Another paddled ceaselessly to and fro across the river, where the little two-company camp had grown into lines for the cavalry and camel corps. Slim-sparred gyassas fringed all the bank; lateen sails bellied over the full river.

Of troops the place was all but empty; the indispensable Egyptians were away up the river cutting and stacking wood for the steamers or preparing depots. In mid-April the Atbara was the as yet unattained objective of the railway; in mid-July the railway was ancient history, and the Atbara was the port of departure for the boats. Just a half-way house on the road to Khartum. What a man the Sirdar is—if he is a man! We got out and pitched our tents; and here we found the men who had not been on leave—the railway and the water transport and the camel transport and the fatigues in general—working harder, harder, harder every day and every night. We drank a gin-and-soda to the master-toast of the Egyptian army: "Farther South!"

XXII.

THE FIRST STEPS FORWARD.

At the beginning of August the military dispositions were not, on paper, very different from those of the end of April. The Sirdar's headquarters had been moved to the Atbara in order that the vast operations of transport at that point might go on under his own eye. Of the four infantry brigades which had fought against Mahmud, three were still in their summer quarters. Neither of the two additional brigades had yet arrived at the front.

The force destined for Omdurman consisted of two infantry divisions, one British and one Egyptian; one regiment of British and ten squadrons of Egyptian cavalry; one field and one howitzer battery, and two siege-guns of British artillery and one horse and four field batteries of Egyptian, besides both British and Egyptian Maxims; eight companies of camel-corps; the medical service and the transport corps; six fighting gunboats, with eight transport steamers and a host of sailing boats.

The Egyptian infantry division was commanded, as before, by Major-General Hunter; but it now counted four brigades instead of three. The First, Second, and Third (Macdonald's, Maxwell's, and Lewis's) were constituted as in the Atbara campaign.

The commanding officers of battalions were the same except for the 13th Sudanese. Smith-Dorrien Bey, who originally raised the regiment, now commanded in place of Collinson Bey. The latter officer had been promoted to the command of the Fourth Brigade. It was entirely Egyptian—the 1st (Bimbashi Doran), 5th (Borhan Bey, with native officers), 17th (Bunbury Bey), and the newly-raised 18th (Bimbashi Matchett). Of these the first was at Fort Atbara; the 17th and 18th were coming up from Merawi, hauling boats over the Fourth Cataract. They reached Abu Hamed by the beginning of August. The 5th was half at Berber and half on the march across the desert from Suakim. The Third Brigade was at various points up-river, cutting wood for the steamers.

The two Egyptian battalions (2nd and 8th) attached to the First and Second Brigades were at Nasri Island, ten miles or so from the foot of the Shabluka Cataract, forming a depôt for supplies and stores. The six black battalions left Berber on July 30, and arrived at the Atbara in the small hours of August 1. Taking the strength of an Egyptian battalion at 750, the division would number 12,000 men.

Major-General Gatacre commanded the British Division. Of its two brigades the First—the British Brigade of the last campaign, now under Colonel Wauchope—was still in summer quarters. Headquarters, Camerons, Seaforths, and Maxim battery at Darmali; Lincolns and Warwicks at Essillem. The last two had changed commanding officers—Lieutenant-Colonel Louth now had the Lincolns, Lieutenant-Colonel Forbes the Warwicks. The latter officer had arrived at Umdabieh two days before the Atbara fight to relieve Lieutenant-Colonel Quale Jones, ordered home to command the 2nd Battalion of the regiment; with rare tact and common-sense it was arranged that Colonel Jones should lead the battalion he knew. Colonel Forbes went into the fight as a free-lance, and I saw him enjoying himself like a schoolboy with a half-holiday. The Warwicks rejoiced once more in the possession of their two companies from the Merawi garrison. Casualties in action, and deaths and invalidings from sickness, had brought down the strength of this brigade, though officers and men had stood the climate exceedingly well. The sick-rate had never touched 6 per cent. There were not fifty graves in the cemetery; and most of the faces at the mess-tables were familiar. The Lincolns, who had come up over 1100 strong, still had 980; the other three battalions were each about 750 strong, and the Warwicks were expecting a draft of sixty men. With the Maxims, A.S.C., and Medical

Service the strength of the brigade would come to nearly 3500. The Second Brigade had not yet come up from Egypt. Colonel Lyttelton was to command. The four battalions composing it were the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers (5th, Lieutenant-Colonel Money) and 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers (20th, Lieutenant-Colonel Collingwood) from the Cairo garrison, the 2nd Rifle Brigade (Colonel Howard) from Malta, and the 1st Grenadier Guards from Gibraltar. Each battalion was to come up over 1000 strong. The 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, from Alexandria, were sending up a Maxim detachment with four guns, so that the whole division would number well over 7500.

Broadwood Bey's nine squadrons of cavalry had concentrated during the last week of July on the western bank opposite Fort Atbara. They were to march up, starting on August 4, and to be joined at Metemmeh by a squadron from Merawi. The 21st Lancers (Colonel Martin) were expected up from Cairo about 500 strong; the total of the cavalry would be about 1500. British and Egyptian were to be separate commands.

The whole of the artillery, on the other hand, was under Long Bey, of the Egyptian Army. The arrival of Bimbashi Stewart's battery from Merawi had completed the strength of the Egyptian artillery; both this battery and Bimbashi Peake's had been re-armed with 9-pounder Maxim-Nordenfeldts, so that all the field guns were now the same. These, with the horse

battery, began to go up the Nile at the beginning of August—the pieces by boat, the horses and mules marching. The 32nd Field Battery R.A. (Major Williams), the 37th Field Battery with 5-inch howitzers and Lyddite shells and two 40-pounder siege guns, were coming up from Cairo. This would give a total of forty-four guns, besides twenty British and Egyptian Maxims.

Two companies of camel corps were at the Atbara, timed to march on August 2. One was coming over from Suakim. The other five, under Tudway Bey, commanding the whole corps, were to start with the Merawi squadron of cavalry, about the same time, and march by Sir Herbert Stewart's route across the Bayuda Desert to Metemmeh. The strength would be about 800. The land force was thus over 22,000 men.

The three new gunboats—Malik, Sheikh, and Sultan —were put together at Abeidieh, the work beginning immediately after the battle of the Atbara, as soon as the railway reached that place. They carry two 12½-pounder Maxim-Nordenfeldt quick-firers fore and aft, and three Maxims, two on the upper deck and one on a platform above. They are lightly armoured, being bullet-proof all over, and the screw is protected by being sunk in a plated well a few feet forward of the stern. As fighting boats they might be expected to show superior qualities to the vessels of the Zafir class; but as beasts of burden with barges they were

inferior to these. Drawing only 18 inches against the older boat's 30 inches, they could not get grip enough of the water to make good headway against the full Nile.

From the disposition of the force, extended along the Nile from Shabluka to Alexandria, and across the desert from Korti to Suakim, it was evident that the campaign had not yet opened by the beginning of August. The army was only entering on the movements preparatory to concentration. The point of concentration was Wad Habashi, a dozen miles or so south of Shabluka; the time was as yet uncertain. Transport was so far forward that we might easily get to Omdurman the first week in September. All depended on the weather. Up to now there had been hardly any rain. But the real rainy season—said Slatin Pasha, who is the only white man with real opportunity of knowing—runs from August 10 to September 10. It might be sooner or later, heavier or lighter. A swollen river, a flooded, torrent-riven bank, malaria and ague, would hold us back. A dry season would pass us gaily through.

And when we advanced from Wad Habashi? It was utterly impossible to say what would befall. If the Khalifa wanted to give us trouble, he would leave without fighting. That would probably mean that he would get his throat cut by one of the innumerable enemies he has made; certainly it would mean the collapse of his empire. But it would also mean a

costly expedition with no finality at the end of it; it would mean years of anarchy, dacoity from Khartum to the Albert Nyanza, from Abyssinia to Lake Chad. Only there was always the relieving thought that Khalifa Abdullahi would aim not so much at giving trouble to us as at avoiding it for himself. With Mahmud's experience before his eyes he might think it safest to be taken prisoner. He might, just possibly, even decide to die game.

Granting that he fought, it was still hopelessly uncertain where and how he would fight. It might be at Kerreri, sixteen miles north of his capital; it might be inside his wall. We could speculate for days; we did; but to come to any conclusion more likely than any other was beyond any man in the army.

XXIII.

IN SUMMER QUARTERS.

SCENE of the dialogue, a mess-room in a village on the Nile. Time, nearly lunch-time. A subaltern is discovered smoking a cigarette under the verandah. Enter I.

Subaltern. Hallo, Steevens! when did you come up? Get down and have a drink. Hi, you syce! Take this *hawaga's hoosan* and take the *sarg* and bridle off and *dini* a drink of *moyyah.* What'll you drink? . . . Oh no: this isn't so bad—better than Ras Hudi, anyhow. You're looking at our pictures—out of the 'Graphic,' you know—coloured them ourselves—helps you through the day, you know: that's a well-developed lady, isn't it? Have a cigarette, will you? We're all getting pretty well fed up with this place by now.

Enter a Captain. Hallo, Steevens! when did you come up? Have you got anything to drink? I suppose you've been at home all this time. No, I haven't been farther north than Berber. Had a very jolly ten days up the Atbara, though. Two parties

went—one with the General, one afterwards. Seven guns got a hundred and sixty-five sand-grouse in one day. Went up right beyond our battlefield. High? Never smelt anything like it in my life. The bush gets very thick above. No; no lions.

Subaltern. We got a croco down here, though, and a bally great fish with a head on him three feet six long, the head alone. No, I haven't been down either. I went down with a boat party to Geneineteh, though—ripping. There was a grass bank just six inches above the water, and you could bathe all day. The men loved it, if they were pretty fit to begin with; if they weren't, you see, what with bully beef and dirty water——

Captain. But we're all getting fed up, as the Tommies say, with this place by now.

Enter a Senior Captain. Hallo, Steevens! I heard you'd come up. In this country it isn't "Have a drink," but "What'll you drink?" Well, here we are still in this filthy country. Yes, I got ten days in Cairo, but I was at the dentist's all the time. Gad, what a country! When I think of all the lives that have been lost for this miserable heap of sand they call the Soudan—ugh!—it's—it's——

Subaltern. Ripping sport: everybody was wondering how the Pari Mutuel was done so well. The truth was, it was run by the same men of the Army Pay Department that do it at the races in Cairo. Devilish good race, too, the Atbara Derby. We thought we

hadn't got a chance against all these Egyptian army fellows, and Fair won it by a head, Sparkes second, a bad third.

Enter a Major. Well, Steevens, how are you? Been up long? Have a—— I see you've got one. Good to see all you fellows coming out again; means business. River's very full to-day, isn't it?

Captain. Risen three feet and an inch since yesterday. The Atbara flood, I suppose. You were at Atbara; did you see it?

I. Rather. It came down roaring, hit the Nile, and piled up on end. Brought down trees, beams, dug-outs——

Major. Well, now, shall we go in to lunch? You didn't see the First British Brigade field-firing to-day, did you? Nothing will come within 800 yards of that alive. Do you think we shall have a fight?

Enter a Colonel. Good morning, Mr Steevens: have you been up long? Are you being attended to? Yes, now; shall we have a fight? What will he do now? I can't bear to think we aren't going to have a fight.

Senior Captain. Fight? wh——

Major. If he'd only come out into the open——

Captain. No; he'll stick behind his——

Subaltern. Wall: then we shall have——

Major. Two days' bombardment; but then, you know——

Colonel. Well, I wish we'd another brigade in reserve to stay at——

Senior Captain. Another brigade, sir? Why, it makes me sick to see all this preparation against such an enemy. We had 1500 men at Abu Klea, and now we've got 20,000. Fanatics? Look at those men we fought at the Atbara, those miserable scallywags. Do you call these fanatics? Sell their lives? give 'em away. Despise the enemy; yes, I do despise them; I despise them utterly. Rifles are too good for them. Sticks, sir, we ought to take to them—sticks with bladders on the end. Why, the moment we came to their zariba they got up and ran—got up like a white cloud and ran. And then all these preparations and all this force? They're a contemptible enemy—a wretched, despicable enemy. Why won't the Sirdar let the gunboats above Shabluka? Because Beatty would take Khartum.

Colonel. Come, come now. But what'll you have to eat now?

General Conversation. Going to the Gymkhana this afternoon. . . . Squat on his hunkers inside his wall . . . won't sell you a drop of milk, the surly devils, when we're saving their country . . . the houses at Omdurman are outside the wall, you know . . . not a bad notion of jumping, that bay pony . . . street-to-street fighting, we should lose a devil of a lot of men . . . did you hear the Guards cabled to ask what arrangements had been made for ice on the campaign? . . . but then he can't defend his wall; it hasn't got a banquette, and it's twelve feet high . . .

gave the recruit their water-bottles to fill at the lake. "Here, Jock," they said, "take mine too." So the wretched man started off with the water-bottles of the whole half-company to fill them at the mirage . . . have another drink . . . rather; fed up with it; railway fatigues, too, and field-days twice a-week . . . it was their Colonel kept them from coming up, they say: damned fine regiment all the same . . . weakest Government of this century, sir . . . stowasser gaiters . . . go under canvas a couple of days before we start . . . ripping sport . . . fed up . . . drink . . .

Colonel (rising). Well, now, will you have a cigarette?

Senior Captain. A miracle of mismanagement. . . .

Voice of Tommy (outside). Whatcher doin'?

Second voice. Cancher see? stickin' 'oods on these 'ere cacolets.

Voice of Tommy. Whatcher doin' that for?

Second voice. Doncher know? To kerry the bleed'n' Grenadier Gawds to Khartum.

XXIV.

DEPARTURES AND ARRIVALS.

On the 3rd of August the six Sudanese battalions left Fort Atbara for the point of concentration at Wad Habashi. Most people who saw them start remarked that they would be very glad to hear they had arrived.

You may have seen sardines in tins; but you will never really know how roomy and comfortable a tinned sardine must feel until you have seen blacks packed on one of the Sirdar's steamers. Nothing but the Sirdar's audacity would ever have tried it; nothing but his own peculiar blend of luck and judgment would have carried it through without appalling disaster.

Dressed in nothing but their white Friday shirt and drawers, the men filed on to the boats. Every man carried his blanket, for men from the Equator have tender chests, but it was difficult to see how he was ever to get into it. On each deck of each

steamer they squatted, shoulder to shoulder, toe to back, chin to knee. Fast alongside each gunboat were a couple of double-decked roofed barges, brought out in sections from England for this very purpose. Both decks were jammed full of black men till you could not have pushed a walking-stick between them: the upper deck bellied under their weight like a hammock. At the tail of each gunboat floated a gyassa or two gyassas: in them you could have laid your blanket and slept peacefully on the soldiers' heads. Thus in this land of impossibilities a craft not quite so big as a penny steamer started to take 1100 men, cribbed so that they could not stretch arm or leg, 100 miles at rather under a mile an hour.

The untroubled Nile floated down brim-full, thick and brown as Turkish coffee, swift and strong as an ocean. The turbid Atbara came down swishing and rushing, sunk bushes craning their heads above the flood, and green Sodom apples racing along it like bubbles, and flung itself upon the Nile. Against the double streams the steamers—seven in all, bigger and smaller, with over 6000 men—pulled slowly, slowly southward. The faithful women, babies on their hips, screamed one more farewell: their life is a string of farewells, threaded with jewels of victorious return. The huddled heaps of white cotton and black skin began to blend together in the blurring sunlight. They started before breakfast; by lunch-time all but one had vanished round the elbow a

mile or two up-stream. The blacks were gone out to conquer again.

Blacks gone, whites came. The Headquarters and first four companies of the Rifle Brigade were in camp before the steamers were under way. These things fit in like the joints of your body till you take them for the general course of things; only when you go to Headquarters and see Chiefs-of-Staff and D.A.A.G.S. and orderly-officers and aides-de-camp calculating and verifying and countersigning and telegraphing and acknowledging, do you realise that the staff-work of an army is the biggest and most business-like business in the world.

The Rifles' first morning of Sudan was not endearing. They were shot out on to a little hillock or platform at half-past one in the morning, in the middle of one of the best dust-storms of the season. Through the throttled moonlight they might have seen, if they had cared to look at anything, the correspondent of the 'Daily Mail' hammering at his uptorn tent-pegs with a tin of saddle-soap, and howling dismally to a mummified servant to bring him the mallet. Tack, tack, tack went the mallets all over camp. But the Rifles had neither tents nor angarebs nor bags: they were dumped down among their baggage and sat down for five hours to contemplate the smiling Sudan. Then they disinterred themselves and their belongings and marched into camp.

But this new brigade was to have a Cook's tour by

comparison with the other. They had abundant kit and abundant stores. From the sea to Shabluka they hardly needed to put foot to the ground: thence it was a matter of half-a-dozen marches to Khartum and Omdurman. Fight there—then into boats again and down to the rail-head at the Atbara; train to Halfa, boat to Assuan, train to Cairo or Alexandria—the two new battalions, Rifles and Guards, might be up and down again, in and out of the country inside a couple of months. The sarcastic asked why they were not brought up in ice, unpacked at Omdurman to fight, and then packed in ice again. But that was unjust. Either you must give a regiment time to get fit and weed out its weaklings, or else you must cocker it all you can till you want it. The Rifles and Guards would never be as hard as the splendid sun-dried battalions of the First Brigade—there was not time to harden them. The next best thing was to keep them fresh and fit by sparing them as much as possible.

So the Rifles made their camp on the Atbara bank—cool, airy, and relatively free from dust-drift. Next day—the 4th—the second half of the battalion came in; next day Brigadier-General Lyttelton with his staff and the 32nd field battery; next day the first half of the Grenadier Guards. So they were timed to go on—half a battalion or a battery or a squadron nearly every morning till the whole second brigade was on the Atbara. Before the tail of it had arrived the head

would be off again—men and guns by boat, beasts by road—to Wad Habashi.

To transport 5000 men, 600 horses, two batteries with draught cattle, and two siege-guns some 1300 miles along a line of rail and river within four weeks is not, perhaps, on paper, a very astounding achievement. But remember last time we came the same way. Remember 1884—the voyageurs and the Seedee boys, the whalers and the troopers set to ride on camels and fight on foot, and all the rest of the Empire-ballet business—the force that left Cairo about the time of year these were leaving, that began to leave Halfa at the opening of September and struck the Nile at Metemmeh late in January, while most of it never got beyond Korti. It is exactly the difference between the amateur and the professional.

Remember, furthermore, that the railway from Luxor to Assuan and the railway from Halfa to the Atbara are both quite new: at home, with every engineering facility which is lacking in the Sudan, a new line is allowed a few months' trial to settle and mature before heavy traffic is run over it. The track is single, the engines are many of them old, the native officials are all of them incapable. The steamers are few and in great part old. The wind for the sailing boats was mostly contrary. The country is a howling red-hot depopulation. Yet every arriving vessel was not merely up to its time but a little before it. It wanted for nothing by the way, and when it arrived found

provision for just three times as long as it was likely to need it.

And all the time, remember, just the same thing was going on up the river. While the trains were bringing the British, the boats were taking the blacks. The gyasses sank their low waists awash with the Nile-flood under groaning loads of supplies: the streets of boxes and sacks at the Atbara never seemed to grow less, but similar streets were rising at Nasri Island. Above us the bank was being stacked with wood for the steamers; below us Egyptian battalions were hauling at more boats to take more supplies forward. All one steady pull along a rope 1300 miles long—a pull without a stumble, without a slack. And the Sirdar ran his eye along the whole tension of it, knowing every man's business better than he did himself. Only furious because the wind was south or west instead of north. He was not accustomed to such luck, and he did not deserve it. But neither did he succumb to it. The sailing boats went south all the same. The Sirdar told them to go south; and somehow, tacking, towing, punting, Allah knows how, south it was.

XXV.

THE PATHOLOGY OF THIRST.

If it had not been for the drink I should never have come twice to the Sudan.

It is part of the comprehensive uselessness of this country that its one priceless production can never be exported. If the Sudan thirst could be sent home in capsules, like the new soda-water sparklets, it would make any man's fortune in an evening. The irony of it is, that there is so much thirst here — such a limitless thirst as might supply the world's whole population richly: on the other side there are millions of our fellow-creatures, surrounded by every liquor that art can devise and patience perfect, but wanting the thirst to drink withal. Gentlemen in England now abed will call themselves accursed they were not here. And even the few white men who vainly strive to do justice to these stupendous depths and intensities, these vast areas and periods of thirst— how utterly and pitiably inadequate we are to our high opportunity.

I wonder if you ever were thirsty? Probably not. I never had been till I came to the Sudan, and that is why I came again. If you have been really thirsty, and often, you will be able to distinguish many variations of the phenomenon. The sand-storm thirst I hardly count. It is caused by light soil forming in the gullet; wash the soil away and the thirst goes with it: this can be done with water, which you do not even need to swallow.

The desert thirst is more legitimately so called: it arises from the grilling sun on the sand, from the dancing glare, and from hard riding therein. This is not an unpleasant thirst: the sweat evaporates on your face in the wind of your own galloping, and thereby produces a grateful coolness without, while throat and gullet are white-hot within. The desert thirst consists in this contrast: it can be satisfied by a gulp or two of really cool water which has also been evaporating through a canvas bottle slung on your saddle.

But in so far as it can be satisfied, it is no true Sudan thirst. The true Sudan thirst is insatiable. The true Sudan thirst—which, to be sure, may be found in combination with either or both of the others, and generally is—is born of sheer heat and sheer sweat. Till you have felt it, you have not thirsted. Every drop of liquid is wrung out of your body: you could swim in your clothes; but, inside, your muscle shrinks to dry sponge, your bones to dry

pith. All your strength, your substance, your self is draining out of you; you are conscious of a perpetual liquefaction and evaporation of good solid you. You must be wetted till you soften and swell to life again.

You are wetted. You pour in wet, and your self sucks it in and swells—and then instantly it gushes out again at every pore, and the self contracts and wilts. You swill in more, and out it bubbles before you even feel your inside take it up. More—and your pores swish in spate like the very Atbara. Useless: you must give it up, and let the goodness sluice out of you. There is nothing of you left; you are a mere vacuum of thirst. And that goes on from three hours after sunrise till an hour before sundown.

You must not think that we are idle all this while —not even correspondents. The real exercise of yourself and your ponies you have begun before breakfast, and intend to continue after tea. For the rest, at Fort Atbara, you can go down to the railway station. If there is a train there, there will be troops getting out of it; if there is not, you can ask when one is expected, and read chalked on a notice-board the latest bulletin of the health of every engine on the road between there and Halfa. On the platform, too, is the post-office. You can ask when the next post goes out or comes in: the dirty Copt boy they call postmaster will answer, "To-morrow." The postal service is not good at Fort Atbara. They say the Sirdar does not allow it room enough; as the room he does allow is entirely filled with the

angarebs of the officials, and as they seldom arise from them, there is doubtless much justice in the complaint.

There are other diversions for the correspondent in the heat of the day. He may walk in the *nuzl*, or station yard. *Nuzl* is the Arabic for a place where things are dumped down—and dumped down in this *nuzl* they certainly are. Streets and streets and streets of them, —here a case of pepper, there the spare wheel of a gun, there jars of rum, there piles of Remington rifles for issue to more or less friendly tribes—everything that an army should or would or could want. There you see the men who do the real hard work of the army—not the men who work hard and then rest, but the men who work hard and never rest—the Director of the Water Transport, the Staff Officer for Supplies and Stores, the Director of Telegraphs. And there, with the hardest worked, you see the tall white-clad Sirdar working—now breaking a man's heart with curt censure, now exalting him to heaven with curt praise. Now ante-dating a movement, now hastening an embarkation, now increasing the load of a barge—for where the Sirdar is there every man and every machine must do a little better than his best.

All this you may see, and sweat, between the hour before sunrise and the hour before sunset. It goes on always, but usually after sunset you look at it no more.

For then the Sudan thirst has spent itself and it is at your mercy. You begin with a bombardment of

hot tea. The thirst thinks its conquest assured; it takes the hot tea for a signal of surrender, and hurls the first cup arrogantly out again through your skin. You fire in the second cup—and you find that you have gained some ground. It may be that tea is nearer the temperature of your body than a merely tepid drink; it may be some divine virtue in the herb; but you feel the second cup of tea settle within you. You feel yourself a degree less torrid, a shade more substantial.

If you are wise you will rest content for the moment with this advantage. Order your pony and gallop an hour in the desert. You will sweat, of course; you need not expect to escape that at any time. But the sweat cools off you, and you ride in with a fresh skin. Take your tub in your tent: the Nile cools faster than the land, and oh the deliciousness of the cold water licking round you!

Now comes the sweet revenge for all the torments of the day. It is quite dark by now, unless the moon be up, leaning to you out of a tender blue immensity, silver, caressing, cool. Or else the sprightly candles beckon from your dinner-table, spread outside the tent, a halo of light and white in the blackness, alert, inviting, cool. You, too, by now are clean and cool. You quite forget whether the day was more than warm or no.

But you remember the thirst. You are cool, but within you are still dry, very dry and shrunken. Take

a long mug and think well what you will have poured into it; for this is the moment of the day, the moment that pays for the Sudan. You are very thirsty, and you are about to slake your thirst. Let it be alcoholic, for you have exuded much life in the day; let it above all be long. Whisky-and-soda is a friend that never fails you, but better still something tonic. Gin and soda? Gin and lime-juice and soda? Gin and bitters and lime-juice and soda? or else that triumphant blend of all whetting flavours, an Abu Hamed—gin, vermouth, Angostura, lime-juice, soda?

Mix it in due proportions; put in especially plenty of soda—and then drink. For this is to drink indeed. The others were only flushing your body with liquid as you might flush a drain. But this! This splashes round your throat, slides softly down your gullet till you feel it run out into your stomach. It spreads blessedly through body and spirit — not swirling through, like the Atbara, but irrigating, like the Nile. It is soil in the sand, substance in the void, life in death. Your sap runs again, your biltong muscles take on elasticity, your mummy bones toughen. Your self has sprung up alive, and you almost think you know how it feels to rise from the dead.

Thenceforward the Sudan is a sensuous paradise. There is nothing like that first drink after sunset, but you are only half irrigated yet: the first drink at dinner—yes, and the second and the culminating whisky-and-soda—can give rich moments. Then

your angareb stands ready, the sky is your bed-chamber, and the breath of the desert on your cheek is your good-night kiss. To-morrow you will begin to sweat again as you ride before breakfast. To-morrow —to-night even—there may be a dust-storm, and you will wake up with all your delicious moistness furred over by sand. But that is to-morrow.

For to-night you have thirsted and you have drunk. And to-morrow will have an evening also.

XXVI.

BY ROAD, RIVER, AND RAIL.

GRADUALLY Fort Atbara transformed itself from an Egyptian camp to a British.

Parts of the Fourth Egyptian Brigade came in from the north, but started south again almost immediately. The steamers which had taken up the blacks began to drop down to the Atbara; as soon as they tied up, new battalions were packed into them, and they thudded up-river again.

Of the four battalions of Collinson Bey's command, the 1st left in detachments on August 8, and the first instalment of the 17th had preceded them on August 7. Three companies of the 5th, with a company of camel corps, reached Berber from Suakim on August 3; they had marched the 288 miles of desert in fifteen days. This was the record for marching troops, and it is not likely that anybody but Egyptians will ever lower it. One day, after a thirty-mile stage, the half-battalion arrived at a well and found it dry. The next was thirty miles farther. Straightway the men

got up and made their march sixty miles before they camped. They say that when, as here, native officers are in command of a desert march, they put most of their men on the baggage-camels: no doubt they do, but the great thing is that the troops get there.

The 5th joined its other half in Berber and marched in to Fort Atbara on August 6; on August 7 it was packed into steamers and sent up to Wad Habashi. On August 9 arrived the first half of the newly-raised 18th and two companies of the 17th. These had been pulling steamers and native boats up from Merawi; they too had broken a record, doing in twenty days what last year had taken twenty-six at the least and forty at the most. Among their steamers was the luckless Teb, which had run into a rock just before Dongola, and in '97 had turned turtle in the Fourth Cataract. The Sirdar had now taken the precaution of renaming her the Hafir.

The four steamers had, of course, arrived days before, and were already broken to harness. The gyassas were still behind, fighting with the prevailing south wind; between Abu Hamed and Abeidieh the trees on the bank were sunk under the flood, so that it was almost impossible to tow. One day the wind would be northerly, and that day the boats would sail forty miles; the next it would be dead contrary, and, sweating from four in the morning to ten at night, they would make five. But it had to be done, and it was done. The first arrivals of the 17th and 18th

were picked up by train south of Abu Hamed; on August 11th and 13th the rest came in to find their comrades already gone. This completed the Fourth Brigade, and with its completion the whole strength of the Egyptian army was at the Atbara or forward.

So that the camp became British. The two halves of the Rifle Brigade, the first half of the Guards, and the 32nd Battery had come up on successive days; after that there was a lull. But on August 9 we had an exciting day—exciting, at least, by the standard of Fort Atbara. Late the night before had come the balance of the British artillery—the 37th Field Battery, with six howitzers, a detachment of the 16th Company, Eastern Division, Garrison Artillery, with two 40-pounders, and a detachment of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, with four Maxims.

They were getting the 40-pounders into position for shipment on the bank. All gunners are fine men, and garrison gunners are the finest men of all gunners; these were pushing and pulling their ungainly darlings in the tire-deep sand as if they were a couple of perambulators. They are old guns, these 40-pounders; their short barrels tell you that. They were in their second decade when they first came to Egypt in 1882, and, once in Khartum, they are like to spend the rest of their lives there. But for the present they were the heaviest guns with the force, and they must be nursed and cockered till they had knocked a hole or two in the Khalifa's wall. So the gunners had laid

out ropes, and now solid figures in grey flannel shirts, khaki trousers, and green-yellow putties — braces swinging from their waists, according to the ritual of cavalry and gunners and all men who tend beasts— were hammering away at their pegs and establishing their capstan with which the enormous babies were to be lowered into their boats. Before they breakfasted all was in order; before they dined the guns were in the boats specially made to take them; before they supped they were well on the waterway to Khartum.

The Irish Fusiliers were picked from a fine regiment which had very hard luck in not being brought up in the Second Brigade. Set faces, heavy moustaches, necks like bulls, the score or so of men were the admiration of the whole camp. But most curiosity went naturally to the howitzers. They were hauling them out of the trucks when I got down—little tubby 5-inch creatures, in jackets like a Maxim's, on carriages like a field-gun's, carriage and gun-jacket alike painted pea-soup colour. The two trucks full of them were backed up to a little sand platform; the gunners wheeled out gun and limber and limbered up; a crowd of Egyptians seized hold, and — hallah hoh! hallah hoh!—they tugged away with them. The cry of the Egyptian when doing combined work is more like that of Brünnhilde and her sisters in the "Walküre" than any civilised noise I can remember to have heard.

The howitzers were to fire a charge of lyddite whose

bursting power is equal to 80 lb. of gunpowder. With a very high trajectory the effect would be something like that of bombs dropped from a balloon. Lyddite appears to be an impartial as well as an energetic explosive; if you stand within 800 yards behind it, it is as like as not to throw back a bit of shell into your eye; after which you will use no other. When they tried it in Cairo at knocking down a wall, it did indeed knock down a good deal of it, but left a good deal standing. That, however, was because percussion fuses were used; the delay fuses were all sent up the Nile. By delaying the explosion the smallest fraction of a second, till the shell has penetrated, its devilishness, they trusted, would be increased a hundredfold. This was lyddite's first appearance in war: we all looked forward to it with keen anticipation. The further forward I looked, personally, the better I should be pleased.

On the afternoon of this same less-uneventful-than-usual 9th, a train snorted in with the second four companies of the Guards. The Guards paraded in their barrack square fill the beholder with admiration, tempered with a sense of his own unworthiness; emerging from roofed trucks they were less imposing. Of course it was the worst possible moment to see them, and the impression formed was less good than that of other corps. Falling in beside the train they were certainly taller than the average British soldier, but hardly better built. They were mostly young,

mostly pale or blotchy, and their back pads—did you know before that it was possible to get sunstroke in the spine?—were sticking out all over them at the grotesquest angles. Many of the officers wore thick blue goggles, and their back pads were a trifle restive too. The half-battalion marched limply. Only remember that they had hardly stretched their legs since they embarked at Gibraltar just three weeks before. The wonder was that they could march at all.

A very different show was that of the 10th, when the first half of the Northumberland Fusiliers came in. To be sure, they appeared with advantages. The Guards' band played in three companies, and you do not know how a band drives out limpness until you have tried. But allowing for that, the 5th still made a very fine entry. The men were not tall, but they were big round the chest, and averaged nearly six years' service. They swung up in a column of dust with their stride long, heads up, shoulders squared, soldiers all over. The officers were long-limbed, firmly knit, straight as lances. There are not many more pleasing sights in the world than the young British subaltern marching alongside his company, his long legs moderating their stride to the pace of the laden men, his wide blue eyes looking steadily forward, curious of the untried future, confident in the traditions of his service and his race. From the look of the 5th Fusiliers you might guess with safety that

the young soldier's confidence was not likely to be abashed.

So that now the camp was all but English. A few Egyptians remained behind, indispensable for fatigues. But the Northumberland men were working away at their ammunition and baggage all the next morning, Tommy lugging at the camel's head-rope and adjuring him to "Come on, ol' man," and the old man, unaccustomed to friendly language, only snarling the more devilishly and tipping his load on to the sand. But Tommy had his revenge when he rode back to the station for another load; the baggage-camel had to trot, which he had never done before except to escape being saddled.

Englishmen working with camels, squads of shirt-sleeved Englishmen tramping to and fro on fatigues, Englishmen putting up hospital-tents, forty or fifty Englishmen with mild sun-fever in hospital, English bands, the crisp voice of the English sergeant, above all, silver-throated English bugles—reveille waking the dawn and last post floating up the silent night—Fort Atbara had seen one more incarnation.

XXVII.

THE LAST OF FORT ATBARA.

Thus at Fort Atbara we sat, and sat, and sat. When there were any troops to see, coming in or going out, we went to see them. When there were not, we galloped about in the desert, ate, drank, slept, and generally fulfilled the whole duty of correspondents. Why did you not make a dash for the front? the guileless editor will ask. But the modern war correspondent is not allowed to make unauthorised dashes, and the man who should commend the claims of his newspaper by slapping a British General's face would righteously be shot.

Besides, there was no front to speak of worth dashing for. The camp at Wad Habashi, we heard, had been encroached on by the ever-rising Nile, and it had been moved four miles up-stream to a spot in full view of the gorge of Shabluka. A Bimbashi of cavalry, who returned thence one day, pronounced the scenery finer than anything in Switzerland; but then you must remember that since seeing Switzer-

land he had seen the desert railway and Berber and Fort Atbara and all the other dry dead levels of the blank Sudan. More practical was the news that as yet there had been only one storm of rain with thunder and lightning. At Fort Atbara we had cloudy days and rainy sunsets, whereas in the spring we had never seen anything but hard blue for weeks together. On the whole, too, it was cooler: 115° in the shade on one or two clear afternoons, but often not so much as 100° all day. And the farther south you went, they said, the cooler it became.

Indeed, the nearer we actually got to the beginning of operations, the softer task the expedition seemed. The only people who did not seem to find it so were the two battalions that had the softest task of all—the Rifles and the Guards. These came into hospital in dozens. Both regiments had a bad reputation for going sick—the Rifles because they are mostly cockneys without constitutions, the Guards because they are too much pampered. Anyhow, they developed more sickness between them in a week than the whole of the First Brigade. Their failure to stand the sun and the dust-storms was not for want of officers' example—certainly in the Rifles, whose officers were keen sportsmen, riding out to stalk gazelle after lunch on the hottest afternoons. It was not for want of amusement, as amusement goes in standing camp, for the Rifles were alive with vocal

talent. Almost every night, drifting down from their camp, you might hear the familiar chorale—

> Jolly good song, jolly well sung,
> Jolly good comrades ev-ery one.
> If you can beat it you're welcome to try;
> Always remember the singer is dry.
> Soop!

The Rifles were keeping their spirits up, and they were as smart and keen as you could wish. But they were not acclimatised, nor were the Guards, so that they sent nearly a hundred cases—mostly mild sun-fever—into hospital in a week.

The first squadron of the 21st Lancers—they were travelling as three squadrons to be re-formed into four in the field—arrived on the 11th. The second half of the 5th Fusiliers came in on the 13th. Everything seemed strolling on satisfactorily and sleepily. Then suddenly the Sirdar aroused us with one of his lightning movements. You will have formed an idea of the sort of man he is—all patience for a month, all swiftness when the day comes. The day came on August 13. At eleven I saw him, grave as always, gracious and courteous, volunteering facilities. At noon he was gone up the river to the front.

The waiting, the sudden start, the caution that breathed no word of his intention, yet dictated an official explanation of his departure before he left—it was the Sirdar all over. And with his departure

Fort Atbara took on yet another metempsychosis. It became all at once the deserted base-camp, a caravanserai for reinforcements, a forwarding depot for stores. True, most of the staff remained—nobody pretending to know what had taken the Sirdar away so astonishingly, unless it was merely his idiosyncrasy of sudden and rapid movement. If anybody had been told any other reason, it was just the man or two that would not tell again.

But curiosity is a tactless futility when you have to do with generals. It was enough that the advance had come with a rush. The detachments of the 17th and 18th Egyptian, sitting about on the bank till steamers arrived to let them complete the brigade, disappeared magically in the Sirdar's wake. With them went their Brigadier, Collinson Bey. On that same evening the leading steamers passed up with parts of the First British Brigade from Darmali. Four days' voyage to below Shabluka and then they would come down in one day for the Second. Then we should be complete and ready for Omdurman.

Meanwhile there was hardly a fighting man in Fort Atbara. The three battalions of the Second Brigade were in camp just south of it, on the Atbara. The first third of the Lancers were across the river; the second came in on the afternoon of the 14th. It wanted only the third squadron and the Lancashire Fusiliers to complete the force. The cavalry was to start on the 16th with every kind of riding

and baggage animal to march up, and the more able-bodied of the correspondents were going with them.

So on the torrid Sunday morning of the 14th we filled the empty fort with a dress rehearsal of camels. In the Atbara campaign I had been part of a mess of three with nine camels: now it was a mess of four with twenty. We marched them all up solemnly after breakfast and computed how much of our multitudinous baggage would go on to them. Fourteen of them were hired camels: a hired camel is cheaper than a bought one, but it generally has smallpox, carries much less weight, and is a deal lengthier to load.

The twenty gurgling monstrosities sat themselves down on the sand and threw up their chins with the camel's ineffable affectation of elegance. The men cast a deliberate look round and remarked, "The baggage is much and the camels are few." Next they brought out rotten nets of rope and slung it round the boxes and sacks. That is to say, one man slung it round one box and the others stood statuesque about him and suggested difficulties. That done, the second man took up the wondrous tale, then the third, then the fourth. This took about two hours. Then they suggested that a camel could not without danger to its health carry more than two dozen of whisky, whereas anything worthy the name of a camel can carry four hundredweight. Altogether they made some fifty

camel-loads of the stuff. And when we said we wouldn't have it, all the men stood round and gabbled, and half the camels girned and gnashed their teeth, and the neighbouring donkeys lifted up their voices and brayed like souls in torment, and when you moved to repulse an importunate Arab you kicked a comparatively innocent camel. Allah was their witness that the camels—which, when we hired them two days before, were very strong—were very weak.

But little we cared. We were going up to Omdurman and Khartum. Camel-loads adjust themselves, but war and the Sirdar wait for nobody. We were marching into lands where few Englishmen had ever set heel, no Englishman for fifteen years. We were to be present at the tardy vengeance for a great humiliation.

XXVIII.

THE DESERT MARCH TO OMDURMAN.

THE column was to move out of camp at five in the morning. But at half-past, when our tardy caravan filed up to join it, dim bulks still heaved themselves up in the yellow smoke, half-sunrise, half-dust-cloud —masses of laden camels, strings of led horses proclaiming that the clumsy tail of our convoy was still unwinding itself. Threading the patchy mimosa scrub, we came out into a stretch of open sand; beyond it, straight, regular, ominous of civilisation, appeared the telegraph wire which crosses the Nile at Fort Atbara, and now ran on to beyond Metemmeh.

In two black bars across the sand, as straight as the wire itself, the flat rays of sunrise shadowed the 21st Lancers. Two travelling or nearly three campaigning squadrons, they were the first British cavalry in the Sudan since 1885. On their side it was their first appearance in war. They were relatively a young regiment, and the only one in the British army which

has never been on active service. You may imagine whether they were backward to come.

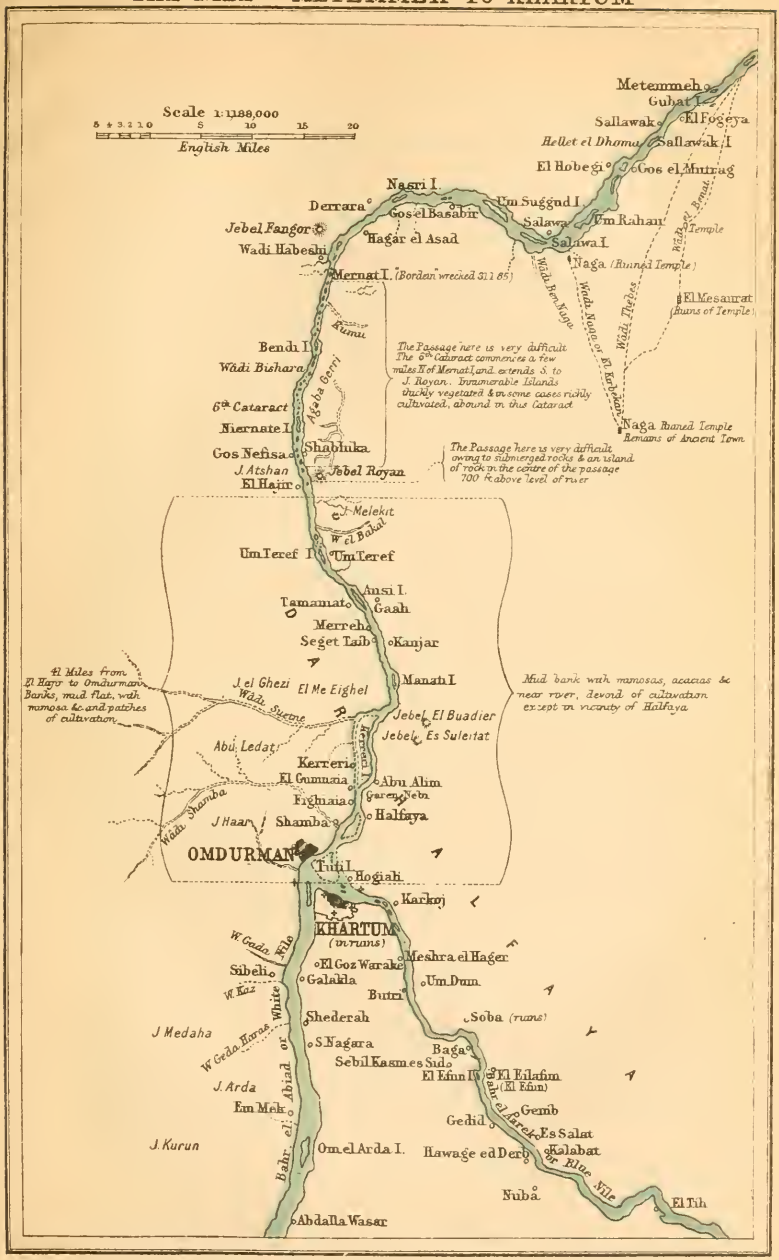
To tell truth, at this first glimpse of British cavalry in the field, they looked less like horsemen than Christmas-trees. The row of tilted lances, the swing of heavy men in the saddle when they moved, was war and chivalry. The rest was picketing pegs lashed to carbines, feeds of corn hanging from saddles, canvas buckets opposite them, waterproofs behind, bulky holsters in front, bundles of this thing and that dangling here and there, water-bottles in nets under the horses' bellies, khaki neck screens flapping from helmets, and blue gauze veils hooding helmets and heads and all. The smallest Syrian—they had left their own big hungry chargers in Cairo—had to carry 18 stone; with a heavy man the weight was well over 20.

But though each man carried a bazaar, the impression of clumsiness lasted only a moment.

When they moved they rode forward solidly yet briskly,—weighty and light at the same time, each man carrying all he wanted as behoves men going to live in an enemy's country. The sight was a better lecture in cavalry than many text-books. It is not the weapons that make the cavalryman you saw, but the mobility; not the gallop, but the long, long walk; not the lance he charges with, but the horse that carries him far and fast to see his enemy in front and screen his friends behind. So much if you wished to

theorise; if it was enough merely to look and listen, there was a fine piquancy in the great headpiece, the raking lance, all the swinging apparatus of the free-booter—and then, inside the casque, a round-faced English boy, and the reflection, "If I was to go and see my brother now, as keeps a brewery, it'd be just right." Masterpiece of under-statement, more telling than a score of superlatives—"just right!" But we must not hurry on too fast. Before the cavalry were well observed, before even thirst became appealing, it was necessary to wait for the whole force—column, or convoy, or circus, or whatever is the technical name for it—to form up in the open. By degrees it did. Leading, the cavalry with its scouts and advanced guard and flanking parties. Then a line of tarbushes on grey horses—Egyptian gun-teams, and with them a couple of Maxims scoring the desert with the first ruts of all its immemorial years. Then a ragged line of khaki and helmets, of blue and crimson and gold and green turbans and embroidered waistcoats—the officers' chargers and transport mules of the two British brigades some with soldier-grooms, some with Berberi syces. Is not the waistcoat of the groom the same radiant marvel whether he be of Newmarket or Kalabsheh? Likewise there were British Maxim mules and the miscellaneous donkeys of all the army. Lastly, lolloping their apathetic two and a half miles an hour, the baggage camels lumbered up the plain—well-furnished Government beasts, with new sound saddles

THE NILE — METEMMEH TO KHARTUM



and little sun-bonnet pads over forehead and pate; scraggier private camels with boxes of stores and green trunks and baths; starveling, hired camels banging whisky cases against their bare ribs. Add to all a few goats already trailing stiff legs behind them, a few sheep trampling their little flesh into whipcord, a drove of brindled bulls at the same task —and you have the caravan.

Every four-footed beast that was to go to Khartum —saving only one-third of the 21st troop horses— must march with this convoy or not at all. Every man that went with it went simply as in charge of a beast; every man was supposed to ride, and the marches were cut out at nearly twenty miles a-day. Horses, mules, donkeys, sheep, goats, oxen, camels— the monstrous caravan sprawled over the desert, jostling and swaying and bumping, jerking off in different directions at different rates, neighing and lowing and braying and bleating and grunting,—Military Tournament, Lord Mayor's Show, Sanger's Circus, and Noah's Ark all jammed into one. Then the multitudinous chaos straightened itself for a second, swayed, crooked itself again, and began to totter towards Khartum.

We tottered for five hours through sparse camel-thorn, over ground mostly once flooded or once rained on, a sieve of lurking holes. By that time many thought we should be near the end of the thirteen miles which was our day's ration, and I, who had idiotically

started without breakfast, wished that I had never seen a horse or the Sudan or the light of day. At last, when it was getting on for one, the head of the column—by now a reeling ruin—turned Nileward. We shook up our horses and licked our split lips. Then we issued on to an old cotton-field—dry stalks, and between them the earth wrinkled with foot-deep cracks as close-grained as the back of your hand. The cracks were just big enough for a horse to break his leg in, and the islands between were just big enough to collapse into the cracks when a horse put his foot on them. Over this we crawled timidly till we came to a shallow yellow-ochre puddle. There we learned that this was our water, and the cracks were our camp.

The cracks proved full of scorpions, and the respective legs of your table or angareb inclined themselves at angles of 45° to the horizontal and to each other. However, we pretended we were at sea going home again, and consumed tinned spiced beef and peaches and beer—may I never want a meal more or deserve it less!—and slept. The feature of next day's march was a new form of vegetation—a bush with leaves something like those of a canariensis, and really green, a phenomenon hitherto not met in the Sudan. And whether we marched twenty-two miles that day as was intended, or thirty-two as was asserted, or something in between as was concluded, I do not know nor then cared: at eight I had called up a camel,

and breakfasted on tinned spiced beef and peaches and beer.

But the important point that emerged was this: the unusually high and ever-rising Nile flood was playing the very deuce with us. The river was pushing up what they call "khors"—broad, shallow depressions which look like tributaries, only whose water runs the wrong way. These planted themselves across the track, and we had to fetch circuits round them. This second day we arrived at a second puddle, which was a second khor, and watered there. But the distressing point in the situation was that the force was to draw rations and forage every second day from depots on the bank. This was the second day, and the depot was duly on the bank; only the khor had flooded up in between. The Lancers had watered their horses, and fed them—and then they had to saddle up at four or so, and file off round the khor three miles to get their rations. Some of the mules had not yet come in; without even off-saddling they had to follow; which made a march of nearly twelve hours on end.

You could not blame anybody for the vagaries of the Nile, but it was natural that somebody would suffer from them. Already at the first halting-place four Egyptians carried in a comrade in a blanket with a rude splint on his leg. The same day a trooper of the Lancers went down. He had been advised not to try the Sudan sun at all, but insisted on his chance of service: after this first march he just got his

horse watered and fed, and then dropped insensible with sunstroke. He was but just conscious next morning. Four Egyptian gunners carried him on an upturned angareb to Kitiab, the second halting-place. Here he was left with others. Next day and the next there were others.

The horses, too, suffered. Those of the squadron which came up first, and the horses from Darmali and Essillem, stood the marching almost perfectly. Those which had started to tramp the morning after the rail-river journey went down with fever in the feet. Twelve days' standing had sent all the blood to their feet; the red-hot sand did the rest.

We left a dozen on the shore at Kitiab to be picked up by a passing boat, if so it might befall. The third day we marched on through a park-like country, thick with tall, spreading, almost green mimosa-trees; in one place, where a khor lapped up, if sand were grass you might almost have cried "The Serpentine." We camped at a ruined village on a sandhill—name unknown and uncared—and for the first time saw the Nile, which we were supposed to be drinking. He was lying at the far end of a three-mile tangle of bush. The fourth day, guided by the brown-faced cliffs on his farther bank, we came down on the pleasantest camp I had yet seen on Nile or Atbara—Magawieh. There was no village but mud ruins; but there were clusters and groves of real palms—date-palms with yellow and scarlet clusters of ripe fruit.

We sat down on the very lip of the river, which came up flush with the grass bank, like a full tide. And there, on August 20, we halted to rest the horses. Half-a-dozen were sent down with fever in the feet; also a few soldiers, some bad, some not so bad as they said. The rest of us were very hard and sound by now, with the skin well peeled off our noses.

By now we had marched about halfway to Wad Habashi. And of population we had seen hardly a soul. Ruined villages we passed in plenty—so far back from the river that they must have lived from wells. Now, since Mahmud killed out the Jaalin, they did not live at all. We found evidences of some poor prosperity—the dry runnels of old irrigation, the little chequers of old fields, old, round, mud granaries, old crackling zaribas, old houses rocking on their mud foundations, old bones white in the sun. All the rest was killed out by the despot we were marching to try to kill. The fighting force of the Jaalin was ahead of us on the same errand, and with two more motives —revenge and loot. Behind us straggled the returning families—one man with a spear, a bevy of plum-bloom girls and old women and infants on donkeys, a goat or two for sole sustenance. They were returning; their ruins were their own again.

XXIX.

METEMMEH.

"GOOM!" The hideous cry broke on to the night, and jarred on the white stars. "Mohammed! Ali! Hassan! Goom, goom!" I sat up on my angareb and groaned. Do not be frightened; "goom" is not the cry of a beast of prey. It is worse; it is the Arabic for "Wake," and it was three in the morning. We were moving out of our pleasant palm-shade at Magawieh on August 21, and taking the road south again.

The clumsy column formed up after its clumsy wont, and threaded sleepily desertward through the mimosa-thorns. After a few minutes we came, to our wonder, on to a broad flat road embanked at each side. It could hardly have been built by scorpions, and there were no other visible inhabitants. Then, at a corner, we came to a sign-post — a sign-post, by all that's astounding — with "To Metemmeh" inscribed thereon. We learned afterwards that the fertile-minded Hickman Bey, finding himself and his battalion

woodcutting in the neighbourhood, had used up some of his spare energy and of his men's spare muscle in making the road and setting up the sign, the only one in the Sudan. At the time the thing was like meeting an old friend after a long parting, and the caravan set out at least half a mile an hour the better for it.

We trudged through the sand and scrub for the best part of five hours. Then suddenly it sank and died away. We had noticed already more than the usual number of mummied camels and donkeys by the road-side. The sun had tanned the skin and bleached the bones; hawks and vultures had seen to the rest; they might have been lying there days or years. The camels lay with their heads writhed back till the ears brushed the hump, the attitude in which a camel always dies. But all the donkeys had their throats cut — and that told us we were reaching Metemmeh.

Last year, about this time or a little earlier, the main force of the Egyptian army lay at Merawi, preparing to advance on Abu Hamed. The Khalifa ordered the Jaalin to advance against it; but the Jaalin had been in the fore-front of every dervish disaster since Abu Klea, and they sent secretly to the Sirdar for arms. But it was too late, and Mahmud fell upon the Jaalin as Hunter fell upon Abu Hamed. They fought hard, but Mahmud had too many rifles for them. Metemmeh was made

even as Khartum and old Berber; the branch of Jaalin whose headquarters were Metemmeh was blotted out of existence. The carcasses we saw were the beasts that had dropped or been overtaken in their flight.

The scrub sank and died away. We came on to a bare level of old cultivated land, sparsely dotted with dry twigs, seamed with rents and holes, and covered thick with bones. Bones, skulls, and hides of camels, oxen, horses, asses, sheep, goats—the place was carpeted with them, a very Golgotha. A sickening smell came into the air, a smell heavy with blood and fat. We off-saddled at a solitary clump of tall palms on the bank, turned round, and across a mile of treeless desolation saw a forlorn line of black mud wall. The look of the wall alone was somehow enough to tell you there was nobody inside. That was the corpse of Metemmeh.

Before we went in we looked at the forts and trenches with which they had lined the bank against the gunboats. It was to be presumed that they had done the same at Omdurman, so we looked at them out of more than idle curiosity. They were rude enough, to be sure. Circular, of some 120 feet radius, the forts were mud emplacements for a single gun with three embrasures looking to front, half right and half left; the guns—captured since at the Atbara—could only be fired as they bore on a boat in line with one of these. Yet, rough and crumbling as they were, it was

plain that the boats' fire had done them little harm. The embrasures were chipped about a good deal, and with very accurate shooting anybody trying to serve the guns would probably have gone down. But the mud work could shelter any man who sat close enough under it, and common shell or even shrapnel would do him little harm. The trenches were not wholly contemptible either—deep and with traverses.

The next thing was to ride over to Mahmud's old camp. He had placed it behind the ridge on which Metemmeh stands, in the open desert and out of range, as he thought, of the boats; the time-fuse of a 12½-pounder shell, picked up in the very centre of the camp, seemed to suggest a subsequent disillusionment. As you rode up you first saw nothing but four mud huts. Then the soil looked redder than that of the desert behind it; presently you saw that it had been turned up in shallow heaps; the place looked like a native cemetery. And when we got a little nearer we found that this was his fortified camp. One of the huts appeared to have been his dwelling-house; another was a sort of casemate—mud walls 4 feet thick and an arrangement of logs that looked as if it had been meant as a stockade to shield riflemen. But the rest of the position was merely childish—as planless as his zariba on the Atbara, without any of its difficulties. It was just a number of shelter-trenches scattered anyhow over the open sand. Some

could have held twenty men, some two. They must have spread over nearly a square mile, but they were quite rare and discontinuous; in the circle of the camp there was about twice as much firm ground as trench. Add that the whole could have been shelled from the Metemmeh ridge at half a mile or so, and that you could thence have seen almost every man in the place —well, if Omdurman was to be no harder nut than this——

Now turn back to Metemmeh—poor, blind-walled, dead Metemmeh. And first, between camp and town, stand a couple of crutched uprights and a cross-bar. You wonder what, for a moment, and then wonder that you wondered. A gallows! At the foot of it a few strands of the brown palm-fibre rope they use in this country, and one, two, four, six, eight human jaw-bones. Just the jaw-bones, and again you wonder why; till you remember the story that when Sheikh Ibrahim, of the Jaalin, came here a week or two ago he found eight skulls under the gallows in a rope-netting bag. When he took them up for burial the lower jaws dropped off, and lie here still.

If the jaws could wag in speech again—but we must try not to be sentimental. If we are, we shall hardly stand the inside of Metemmeh. So blank and piteous and empty is the husk of it. These are not mere mud hovels, but town houses as the Sudan understands houses—mud, certainly, but large, lofty rooms with

wide window-holes and what once were matting roofs. Two that I went into were even double-storied; no stairs, of course, but a sort of mud inclined plane outside the walls leading to the upper rooms. Another house had a broad mud-bank forming a divan round its chief room. Now the beams were cracked and broken, and the divan had been rained on through the broken roof; shreds of what once may have been hangings were dangling limply in the breeze. At the gateway of this house — once an arch, now a tumble of dry mud — was a black handful of a woman's hair.

In every courtyard you see the miserable emblems of panic and massacre. Ride through the gate—there lies a calabash tossed aside; a soiled, red, peak-toed slipper dropped from the foot that durst not stop to pick it up again; the broken sticks and decayed cords of a new angareb that the butchers smashed because it was not worth taking away. And in every courtyard you see great patches of black ashes spreading up the wall. Those monuments are recent; they are the places where, only days ago, they burned the bones of the Jaalin. The dead camels and donkeys lie there yet, across every lane, dry, but still stinking. A parrot-beaked hairy tarantula scrambles across the path, a lizard's tail slides deeper into a hole; that is all the life of Metemmeh. Everything steeped in the shadeless sun, everything dry and silent, silent. The stillness and the stench merge together and soak

into your soul, exuding from every foot of this melancholy graveyard--the cenotaph of a whole tribe, fifteen years of the Sudan's history read in an hour. Sun, squalor, stink, and blood: that is Mahdism.

Press your bridle on the drooping pony's neck; turn and ride back to the river, the palms, and the lances. God send he stays to fight us.

XXX.

A CORRESPONDENT'S DIARY.

Wad Hamed, Aug. 22.—The concentration of the force here is all but complete.

The British regiments have all arrived, whole or in part, with the exception of the Rifles and the 21st Lancers, of whom two squadrons are marching by the road. They are expected at mid-day to-morrow.

With almost the full strength of the Egyptian army added, the force is the largest ever seen in the Sudan, the composition of every arm being at least half as strong again as at the Atbara.

The cavalry and the convoy are going very well now. The beasts and men are hardened by marching, which is an invaluable training. We came twenty-five miles to-day in one march without effort.

Wad Hamed, Aug. 23.—The camp here is both compact and commodious. Though there are but little short of 20,000 men, in a zareba barely more

than a mile long, nobody is crowded, and everywhere there is easy access to water.

The blacks are encamped at the south end in terraces of straw huts; next are the Egyptians under shelters extemporised from their blankets; at the north end the British are installed in tents. Their quarters are far more comfortable than at Atbara, though officers and men have to sleep in their boots for the sake of practice.

There is but little shade from the trees, but the camp is covered with tufts of coarse yellow grass, which keep down the dust.

The steamers lying along the shore, the guns, horses, mules, and camels, the bugle-calls, and the cries in English and Arabic, make up a little world full of life in the desert.

The concentration will not actually be effected here as General Hunter, with two Egyptian brigades, will march to-morrow to Hajir at the head of the Shabluka cataract, where there will be a new concentration within a few days. He will be followed in the evening by his other two brigades, which will march to various points up the river, and cut wood for the steamers ascending the rapids.

The Lancers will arrive here this evening, and the Rifles will come probably by boat early to-morrow. The force will then be complete. There was an imposing parade of the forces here this morning. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Egyptian Brigades and the

2nd and 1st British Brigades paraded in the above order, counting from the right. The force advanced in columns of companies, then turned half-right on the extreme right brigade. It was difficult to get a full impression of the manœuvres in consequence of the dust.

News from Omdurman is abundant, and reconnaissances show that the top of the Shabluka cataract is definitely abandoned. It is rumoured that the Khalifa intends to meet our force in the open; but this story, as the story of the blowing-up of the Khalifa's steamer in an attempt to lay a mine, must be taken with the greatest caution. The Khalifa probably does not know his own intentions yet.

The Egyptian troops and the seasoned British brigade are in splendid condition. The 2nd British Brigade is naturally not so inured to the climate. Everybody is straining on the tiptoe of expectation.

Wad Hamed, Aug. 24 (4 p.m.)—Last night brought us the best storm of the season.

It began, as its way is, savagely and without a second's warning.

A flicker of silver lightning, a bloated drop of rain, then the wind rushed down snorting and tearing at the tent-ropes like an angry stallion.

It tore up the tents, and left them flapping in agony, while the rain came down and completed the conquest by drenching our kits at its leisure.

What was worse, the gyassa, laden with stores and spare kits, belonging to an Egyptian battalion which was just about to start forward, was blown clean over, and everything shot into the river.

At daylight you could see the disconsolate fatigue-party, which was left behind to tow the gyassa, wearily salvaging, with chocolate legs naked below the waist, but with irreproachable uniform above.

The lightning flared and the wind bombarded us till the morning, when we reaped one consolation—the dust was all gone, except that which had formed layers on our faces.

The morning was grey, gusty, and nipping; it might have been a summer morning at home.

General Hunter left this morning at daybreak, with the 1st and 3rd Egyptian Brigades, for Hajir, a two days' march for them.

The 2nd and 4th Brigades followed this afternoon.

If the rain had soaked their kits, at least it afforded cool, clean going.

The baggage of the Egyptian Infantry started in gyassas up the Sixth Cataract early this morning.

The second half of the Rifles and the Irish Fusiliers' Maxim detachment arrived during the night, completing the British division.

The cavalry and guns will leave to-morrow, the forty-pounders and the howitzers going by water.

The staff will follow, and then, as the Sirdar says, "We shall be in the straight."

Wad Hamed, Aug. 25 (2 p.m.)—Rumours from Omdurman continue to add vastly to the eager curiosity wherewith we advance to lift the veil from Khartum.

A trustworthy report asserts that Ali Wad Helu, the Mahdi's second Khalifa and titular heir to the present ruler, has fallen from his horse while drilling the dervish cavalry, and suffered severe injuries.

This, if true, presumably delights the Khalifa, who is jealous of Helu, but will tend to discourage the superstitious Sudanese, who hold that a fall from a horse when entering on an enterprise is the worst of omens.

Yesterday morning this camp was the most populous centre in the Sudan after Omdurman. This afternoon it is all but raw scrub again.

Out of the tangle of yellow halfa-grass the Sirdar's tent rises like an island, and except for the headquarters and the artillery and cavalry in the extreme north, the camp is completely deserted.

The Egyptian infantry division, which left yesterday morning, should reach Hajir—officially called Gebel Royan—to-day.

The 2nd British Brigade left here at daybreak this morning, and the 1st follows this afternoon.

The Rifles are remaining with detachments of other

battalions delayed on the journey up; they will probably proceed to Gebel Royan by boat, doing the distance in one day instead of two.

Perhaps even more striking than the disappearance of the troops is the diminution of the vast accumulation of supplies and stores.

The little town of cases and sacks has had street after street lifted away and sent up to Shabluka.

Seeing the process thus in miniature, we can approach an adequate idea of the labour, promptness, and system which brought all the necessaries for 25,000 men from Atbara, Merawi, Halfa, Egypt, and England without a break or hitch.

Last night the whole upward course of the river was fringed with the taper spars of the gyassas, and festooned with the smoke from the camp-fires of the towing-parties.

Everything has gone on in proper time and proper order, and the weight of the material shifted is enormous.

Multiply all this a hundredfold, and you appreciate the standing miracle of Egyptian transport.

Wad Hamed, Aug. 25 (6 p.m.)—The march out of the 1st British Brigade this afternoon was a most imposing spectacle.

The four battalions had all their baggage packed to the minute, and at the sound of the bugle moved off and took the road in four parallel columns.

The Warwicks were on the left; next to them the Seaforths, then the Camerons, and on the right the Lincolns — the three last carrying battalion flags, a new element of colour since the Atbara campaign.

The ground just outside the camp was broken, but the men struck along with an easy swing from the loins, ignoring the weight of their kits.

Many of the men were bearded, and all were tanned by the sun, acclimatised by a summer in the country, hardened by perpetual labours, and confident from the recollection of victory—a magnificent force, which any man might be proud to accompany into the field.

Wad Hamed, Aug. 26 (11.45 a.m.)—The camp this morning shows even an emptier desolation than yesterday.

At the north end the Lancers are disembarking their last horses, preparatory to the march to Hajir to-morrow, the gunners are readying the 40-pounders and howitzers for the steam-up to-day, the rest of the artillery marches.

The medical staff is just leaving, having sent the sick down to Nasri yesterday.

The rest of the camp is a wilderness of broken biscuit-boxes and battered jam-tins, dotted with the half-naked Jaalin scallywags, male and female, once the richest slave-dealers in the Sudan, now glad to

collect empty bottles and winnow the dust for broken biscuit.

With the departure of headquarters to-morrow the whole force will have shifted camp to Hajir.

Thence it is under forty miles to Omdurman.

For the first half of the distance the bank is flat with cultivation.

On nearing Kerreri, the ground becomes broken with thick low thorn scrub.

Thence to Omdurman rises a cluster of sandstone hills inland, 300 feet to 500 feet high.

In the present state of the Nile the river forms numerous khors, or small tributaries, flowing out instead of into the river, and many such on approaching Omdurman will perhaps necessitate detours on the line of march.

To the north-west of the town there is rising ground which is said to offer a favourable artillery position.

Wad Hamed, Aug. 26 (2.40 p.m.)—Major Stuart-Wortley, who went up to Khartum two days after Gordon's death, leaves to-night by the right bank with the friendlies, Jaalin and other tribes.

They will advance parallel with the Sirdar.

It is reported that a dervish force is on the right bank, under the Emirs Zeki and Wad Bishara.

A few dervish scouts are reported on this bank, near Gebel Royan, opposite our new camp and depot also patrols on the left bank.

The Khalifa blundered heavily when he abandoned the Shabluka rapids, as even a small force among the rocks might have been troublesome, whereas now the Sirdar has been able to convey all his transport to the open water above without pause.

Gebel Royan, Aug. 28 (8.5 a.m.)—We are now within four marches of Khartum. From the brown shoulder of Royan mountain, which overlooks and gives its name to the camp, you can see long stretches of green-lipped desert, blinking in the sun, and cutting the blue ribbon of open water to Omdurman.

In the distance hangs a white speck of haze, which may be the Mahdi's tomb.

Yesterday I came up with the main force.

This morning it has gone forward again, and the four marches are becoming three.

General Hunter, with the Egyptian Division, began to move out before sunrise, and as I write—eight o'clock—their last drums are throbbing faintly in the distance.

The Egyptian cavalry, horse battery, camel corps, and galloping Maxims had preceded them before dawn.

Cavalry contact with the dervishes has been possible at any moment since Friday.

The patrols saw a few dervish horse, who, however, fell back rapidly, lighting alarm beacons.

Spies and deserters report that the advanced dervish force is near Kerreri, but it is impossible to tell at present if this be so.

Hitherto the Dervishes have made no attempt to raid convoys or to alarm the camp by night; they are simply falling back on the main positions.

Everybody observes that the farther you advance into their country, the more desirable, or rather the less undesirable, it becomes.

I marched here from Wad Hamed, so I cannot depict fully the beauties of the Shabluka cataract, but I have seen enough from above and below and from various points of the road to understand how grateful it is to eyes seared with burning plains.

The rapids are gemmed with green wooded islands and waist-high bush grass, and the rocky heights on either side are bathed in violet by the morning and evening lights.

At the gorge the cliffs close in, and the river narrows from 2000 to 200 yards.

Here are dervish forts, three on the left bank and one on the right.

They are now flush with the water, which is actually running into the embrasures.

Having had to march with the artillery, I had to content myself with the beauties of the Maxim-Nordenfeldt gun.

The Egyptian field artillery you can either draw with two mules or take the pieces and carry them on

four—a vast advantage, as shown on yesterday's march, which was an alternation of stones and wallowing sand.

On entering the camp I came on the tail of the British Division, which had made four marches of twenty miles.

The Egyptians took two, but the going is exceptionally bad; natives and British alike fell out somewhat freely.

The massed black bands welcomed the British, thundering out the march past of each of the regiments.

The Rifles, though soft, were commended for smartness in marching, as were the Northumberland Fusiliers.

The flood has formed a khor across the original camp, and the British are in detached zariba to the southward, which is lined nightly with a living rampart of soldiers, alert, eager, and tingling in anticipation of a fight.

Gebel Royan, Aug. 28 (12.20 p.m.)—The "Zafir," the flagship of the gunboat flotilla, Captain Keppel, with General Rundle, chief of the staff, on board, sprang a leak the day before yesterday off Shendi.

The boat was headed for the shore, but sank within a few yards of the bank.

Only her funnel and mast are above water.

The barges in tow were cut adrift, and everybody behaved with the greatest coolness.

Captain Keppel was the last man to leave.

All lives were saved, but a quantity of kit was lost.

Considering that the navy has been two years at work, that the steamers are of light draught, and that there is a tremendous head of water in the river, it is wonderful that this is the first serious mishap.

Everybody sympathises with Captain Keppel, and deplores this stroke of bad luck at the end of months of splendid work.

He transfers his flag to the Sultan.

The whole force advances this afternoon about eight miles.

Wady Abid, Aug. 29 (8.40 a.m.)—The whole army is camped here, the British division having left Royan in the cool of the evening and marching in by moonlight.

The camp is estimated to be twenty-eight miles from Omdurman and eighteen from Kerreri, where there is every reason to believe that the Dervishes are collecting.

The army will halt here at least till evening.

Meanwhile a reconnaissance, consisting of the Egyptian cavalry, with the Maxims and camel corps, is patrolling ten miles to the southward, and a gunboat has been despatched to patrol the stream.

A dervish patrol of ten men was seen yesterday evening. It fell back.

Deserters are now beginning to arrive in swarms, and a sifting of their reports shows that it may be considered certain that the Dervishes mean to fight.

The weather till now has been magnificent, and beyond the most optimistic expectations.

The heat is now extreme in the daytime, but the nights are cool and dry.

This morning was overcast, and there were furious gusts of wind from the north-east, which are supposed to be precursors of rain.

So far we have had only three rainstorms.

Violent and tempestuous weather at this stage might breed discomfort but not delay.

The correspondents would find the chief disadvantage of rain in the possible interruption of the field telegraph, which has been brought here, and will probably advance farther, though it is only poled as far as Nasri Island, and wet ground might cause a breakdown of communications.

10.15 a.m.—The reconnaissance has returned, having seen only a few fresh tracks of dervish horsemen, owing to the dust blown off the alluvial land into the desert having covered up their traces.

The fewness of the tracks confirms the conjecture that the Dervishes have resolved to retire to ground of their own choosing.

The cloudy morning turned to the opaquest dust-storm of recent experience.

The rushing south wind swishes through the camp, whirling the dust of the old cultivation in yellow clouds before it, and the desert outside the zariba forms a half-solid curtain of flying earth.

Riding round the camp to-day, the dust of which clung to my eyelashes and formed dangling screens of accumulated Sudan before my eyes, I was much struck by the advantage which experience in campaigning here gives the Egyptian over the British troops.

All alike are under blanket shelters, but the Egyptians rig up all the blankets of one company into a continuous shed on high poles, which gives an airy shelter, leaves the camping-ground clearer, and economises blankets, so that enough are left to hap round the rifles.

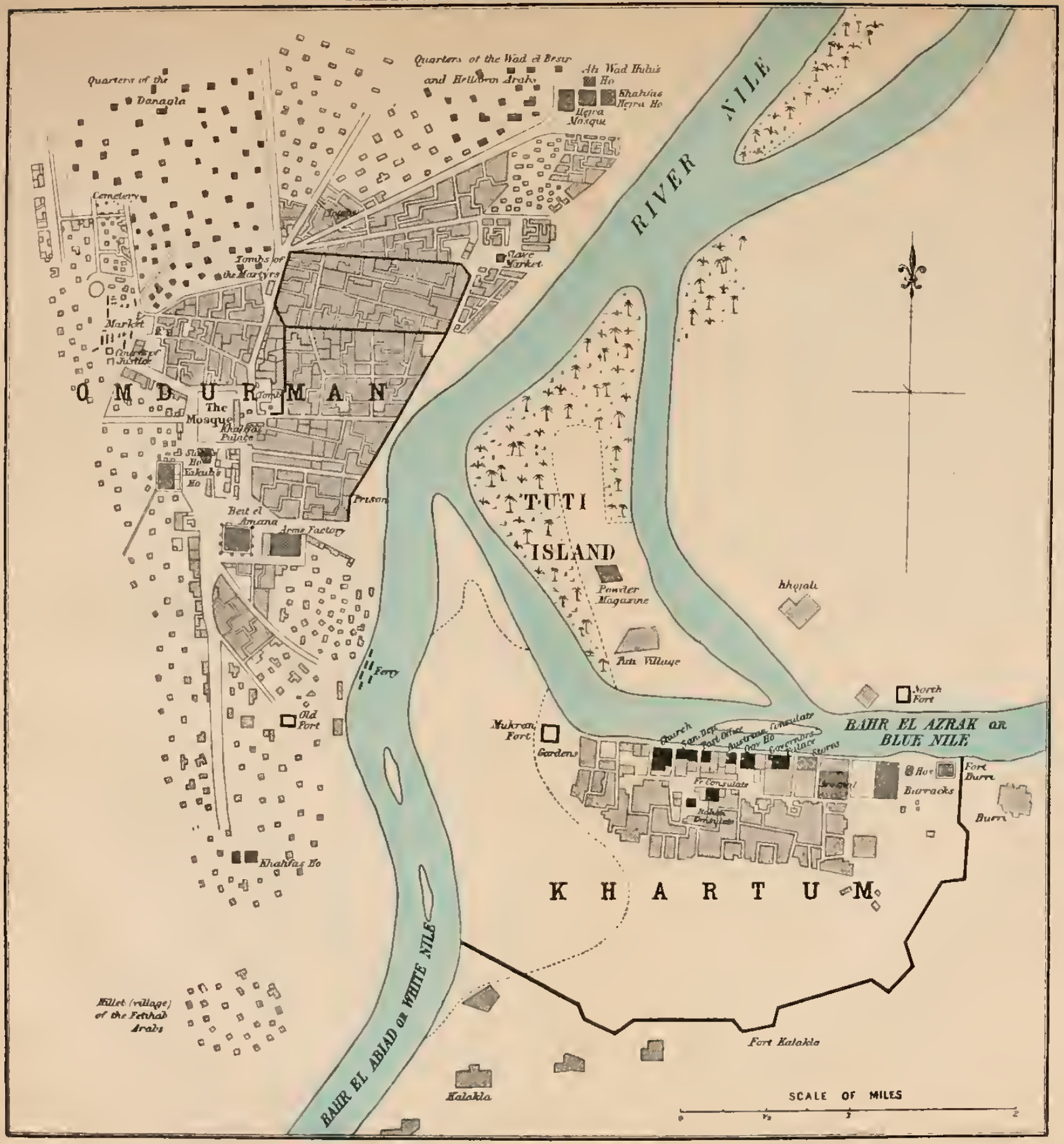
The British, contrariwise, fix one or two blankets on low sticks, and their ground is less thoroughly cleared of scrub to begin with.

Dotted promiscuously over the ground are tiny booths, beneath which the men swelter, with the back flaps of their helmets turned over their faces to screen off the sun. Even through the veil of dust he presses on to the blanket so close that the men cannot uncover their heads.

This is not a white man's country.

1.15 p.m.—There is abundant evidence that the spot where we are now camped was in the recent occupa-

KHARTUM AND OMDURMAN



tion of the enemy—angarebs and women's trinket-boxes being littered all over the place.

The Dervishes are almost certainly falling back before us on to positions determined beforehand, where they expect advantage from scrub, and it would be no surprise here if a decisive battle were fought some distance north of Omdurman.

The Intelligence Department naturally keeps its own counsel, since a daily interchange of spies between the hostile headquarters is now easy.

It is safe to say that all the advantage of information is on our side, all the stories of the deserters being carefully sifted by men accustomed to thread the tortuous mazes of the Arab mind.

The Intelligence Department camp is to-day strewn with plum-coloured, thin-cheeked dervishes squatting in groups on the ground munching biscuit, the first earnest of the renewed blessings of civilised rule.

It must not, however, be inferred from this that the Khalifa's trusted fighting men are deserting.

These are so detested on account of half a generation of barbarities that they know there is no asylum left them in all Africa: they will die resolutely.

Wady Abid, Aug. 30 (9.40 a.m.)—We are again on the march, the army advancing ten miles to Sayal—another stride towards Omdurman.

Major Stuart-Wortley's friendlies have captured

five prisoners, together with a barge laden with grain, after a brush with some dervishes on the right bank of the Nile.

During the storm which continues to rage here the British outposts last night heard the patter of hoofs, and suddenly a dervish horseman rode up, shouting "Allah!" and hurled his spear over their heads; then, wheeling round, he galloped away unhurt.

XXXI.

THE RECONNAISSANCES.

Reveille at four had forestalled daybreak; at five we were between dawn and sunrise. Inside the swarming zariba of camp Sayal impatient bugles were hurrying whites and blacks under arms. Outside it the desert dust threw up a sooty film before the yellow east; the cavalry and camel-corps were forming up for the day's reconnaissance. Four squadrons of British 21st Lancers on the left, nine squadrons of Egyptian horsemen on the right with the horse guns, they trotted jangling into broad columns of troops, and spread fan-wise over the desert.

The camel-corps stayed a moment to practise a bit of drill of their own. One moment they were a huge oblong phalanx of waving necks and riders silhouetted against the sunrise; a couple of words in Turkish from their Bey and the necks were waving alone with the riders in a square round them; an instant more and camels and men had all knelt down. The camel-corps was a flat field of heads and humps hedged with

a shining quickset of bayonets. That rehearsed, they loped away to the extreme right: they can wait longer for their water than the horses, so that their portion is always the outer desert.

One instant we were with the main army by the zariba. The next—so it seemed after a few days of marching with the infantry—we were off and clear away. The screen was spread far out before the toiling infantry, and the enemy who would harass or even look at them must slip through us or break us if he could. It looked little enough like either. As soon as our scouts were off the country was full of them.

It was the last day of August—above a month since the first battalions had left the Atbara, two days before we were to take Omdurman, and the first shot of the campaign was yet unfired. But before us rose cliff-like from the river, and sloped gently down to the plain, the outline of Seg-el-Taib hill; from that were only a dozen miles to Kerreri; from Kerreri were only ten to Omdurman. From the hill we should surely see.

So hoofs pattered, and curb-chains jingled, and stirrups rang, and behold we were round the inland base of Seg-el-Taib and scrambling up its shaly rise. From the top we looked out at the ten-mile reach of river and the hundred-mile stretch of plain, rejoicing in the young sunlight. On our left, four gunboats—two white of

the new class, two black of the old—trudged deviously, slowly, surely up under the right bank. Across the shining steel ribbon of Nile lay a vast tangle of green—only a fifth funnel and Maxim-platforms crawling along its horizon revealed it an island. On our right, the brilliant mimosa-scrub—in this rainy country mimosa grows real leaves and the leaves are green—stretched forward to a dim double hill, a saddle in the middle, gentle ridges dipping down at each end to river and desert. At our feet, round a sandy creek, clustered white and brown cavalry like bees, lances planted in the sand, men bent over bits, horses down on their knees for the water. In the desert a slowly advancing lozenge under a cloud of dust stood for the camel corps. Over our shoulders a black tide licked yet more slowly southward; that was infantry and guns. Sun, river, birds, green; grim, stealthy gunboats and that awfully advancing host; it combined into the most heart-winning, most heart-quaking picture of all the war.

But we were looking for somebody to kill. Mud-walled villages, as everywhere, fringed the river-bank; by one the cavalry were watering; another further on focussed the landscape with the conical-pointed tomb of some sheikh or holy man. And—what?—the glasses, quick!—yes, by George it is! One, two, three, four, five—our scouts? impossible; there are our scouts a mile this side of them. No: Dervishes—

dervish horse; the first sight of them, for me, in the campaign. Dervish horse three miles this side of Kerreri.

Stand to your horses! Prepare to mount! Mount! This time the plain was fuller, the jingling merrier, the bobbing lance-points more alert than ever. On and on—a troop through the dense bush, a couple of squadrons in line over the open gravel, scrambling through a rocky rent in the ground, halting to breathe the horses and signal the scouts—but always on again. Always, by comparison with infantry, we seemed to fly, to spread out by magic, to leave the miles behind us in a flash.

But the Dervishes seemed to have vanished, as their wont is, swallowed up by dervish-land. We had already passed the spot chosen for the night's camp; we were to go on a mile or two beyond "to make it good," as they say. At last we halted. "We shall water here," said the Colonel, "and then go home." Then suddenly somebody looked forward through his glasses. "By Gad, the Gippy cavalry are charging!"

"That's not the Gippy cavalry," sings out somebody else; "that's our advanced squadron." Mount and clatter off again. I didn't see them, but it was good enough to gallop for; and now, sure enough, we plunge through the mimosa and find the advanced squadron pressing on furiously, and the best gentleman rider in the army with a dervish lance in his hand. The squadron found them in the bush, and galloped at

them, but they were too quick away. We scrambled on, round that bush, down and up that gully, and presently came out again into a rising swell of gravel. And there were the lines of Kerreri.

Behind another stretch of thicker bush, perhaps a mile through, under the twin hills, was a flutter of something white—white splashed with crimson. Kerreri lines beyond a doubt; only what was the white? Loose garments of horsemen riding through the bush? Tents? Flags? Yes; it must be flags. Already a subaltern was picking his way through the bush with an officer's patrol. Immediately another strolled away to the left; already one white gunboat had almost outflanked the lines. The whole regiment was now up, and dismounted in columns of squadrons in the open. When the saddle alone weighs eight stone it is always useful to relieve a horse of the man. Colonel and majors, captains and adjutants and subalterns, sergeant-major and privates to hold the horses, grouped on a little knoll. Popular the man who had a good field-glass.

Tap, tap, tap, floated down the wind. They were beating their war-drum. "Where's Montmorency?" "Gone into the bush, sir." Pop! Very faint and muffled, but all hearts leaped: it was the first shot of the campaign. And then through the bushes galloped a bay horse riderless. Tap, tap, tap: they were still beating the war-drum. "What's that to right of the flags?" "Men, sir," says the sergeant-major,

taking his pipe out of his mouth. "I can see them with the naked eye." Tap, tap, tap. "Where's Montmorency?" "In the—— there he is, sir, coming back." "Very well; send a man to recall that patrol on the left. We've seen where they are: we'll go home now, quietly."

Then in came the smiling subaltern. One man had thrown a spear at him and one had loosed off an elephant gun; but he had dropped one man off the bay horse. There were thirty flags or so: it might mean perhaps 3000 men. The patrol from the left reported some 200 horsemen striking away to their right rear. It might mean retreat: it might mean a flank attack. It did not matter which. We had seen; the reconnaissance had succeeded: we walked home quietly.

The next day,—the army had marched eight miles to Wady Suetne—it was the Egyptian cavalry,—nearly twice as many of them, and the camel-corps and horse-battery besides. This time we started only five miles or so from Kerreri, and before we had gone an hour the 21st were in the lines. It had been a retreat we had seen the day before; anyhow, it had become so later, when the gunboats shelled the position; the place was empty. We crossed over to the left and cantered up expectant, but there was nothing to see. Only a few miserable tukls twisted out of bushes: Jonah had a better house under his gourd. Kerreri had been a fable—a post of observation never meant to be held.

But the lines mattered little: it was to the hill behind it that eyes turned. Now we were on the very brink, and could look over it to forecast the great day. Should we see dervishes coming on, or should we see dervishes streaming away? We must see something, and we scrambled up, and at last, and at last, we saw Omdurman. We saw a broad plain, half sand, half pale grass; on the rim by the Nile rose a pale yellow dome, clear above everything. That was the Mahdi's tomb, divined from Gebel Royan, now seen. It was the centre of a purple stain on the yellow sand, going out for miles and miles on every side—the mud-houses of Omdurman. A great city—an enormous city—a city worth conquering indeed!

A while we looked; but this was a reconnaissance. The thing was to look nearer and see if there were any enemy. The Lancers had gone on towards some villages along the river, between our hill and another three or four miles on. The Egyptian mounted troops turned south-westward, inland. We did not altogether know what we were going to do or see: perhaps it was that dark patch halfway between our line of advance and the British, which might be trees or might be men. But Broadwood Bey knew very well where we were going, and what we were going to see. We began to march towards a clump of hills that drew in north-westward within three miles of the outskirts of Omdurman; the map calls it Gebel Feried. We came

into swamps deepened by the last night's rain; we crossed soft-bottomed streams; it would have been desperate ground to be attacked in, but still the leader rode on and the heavy columns rode behind him. At last we came behind the south-easternmost hill, and the squadrons halted and the guns wheeled into line and the camels barracked. We went up the hill and again we saw.

Omdurman was nearer, more enormous, more worth conquering than ever. A gigantic tract of mud-houses; the Mahdi's tomb rising above them like a protecting genius; many other roofs rising tall above the wont of the Sudan, one or two with galvanised iron roofs to mirror the sunlight. With its huge extent, its obvious principal buildings, its fostering cathedral, the distant view of Omdurman would have disgraced no European capital: you might almost expect that the hotel omnibus would meet you at the railway station.

But once more we were on reconnaissance; we were there to look for men. In front of the city stretched a long white line—banners, it might be; more likely tents; most likely both. In front of that was a longer, thicker black line—no doubt a zariba or trench. Then they did mean to fight after all. Only as we sat and ate a biscuit and looked—the entrenchment moved. The solid wall moved forward, and it was a wall of men.

Whew! What an army! Five huge brigades of it

—a three-mile front, and parts of it eight or ten men deep. It was beginning to move directly for our hill, and—tum, tum, tum—we heard the boom of a war-drum of higher calibre than yesterday's. Now they seemed to halt; now they came on. The five corps never broke or shifted, the rigid front never bent; their discipline must be perfect. And they covered the ground. The three miles melted before them; our scouts and the Lancers' and theirs were chasing each other to and fro over the interval; we saw a picket of the Lancers fire. "We'll go back now," said the serene voice of the leader. The force formed up, and we started on the eight-mile walk between ourselves and support.

The sun had hardened the swamp underfoot, but the guns and camels still made heavy going of it. We had not been moving twenty minutes before we saw a black mass of the enemy watching us from the hill whence we had watched them. And their line was still coming on, black over a ridge not a mile behind us. Tum, tum, tum — they were getting nearer; now we heard their shouts, and saw their swords brandishing in the sun. Tum, tum, tum—roar —brandish — how slowly the camels moved! The troopers in the long column of our outside flank were beginning to look over their shoulders. Then the doctor came galloping like mad from behind. "Where's Broadwood?"—and we saw the rear-guard squadron faced about and galloping towards the enemy. The

bugle snapped out and the troops of the flanking regiment whipped round and walked towards the enemy too. They were within a thousand yards. Now—

It was only a dismounted trooper they were fetching back. The troops turned again, and we walked into camp. It was a perfect reconnaissance,—not a man lost, not a shot fired, and everything seen.

XXXII.

THE BATTLE OF OMDURMAN.

Our camp, for the night of September 1, was in the village of Agaiga, a mile south of Kerreri Hill. On our left front was another hill, higher, but single-peaked and rounder—Gebel Surgham. In front the ground was open for five miles or so—sand and grass broken by only a few folds—with a group of hills beyond.

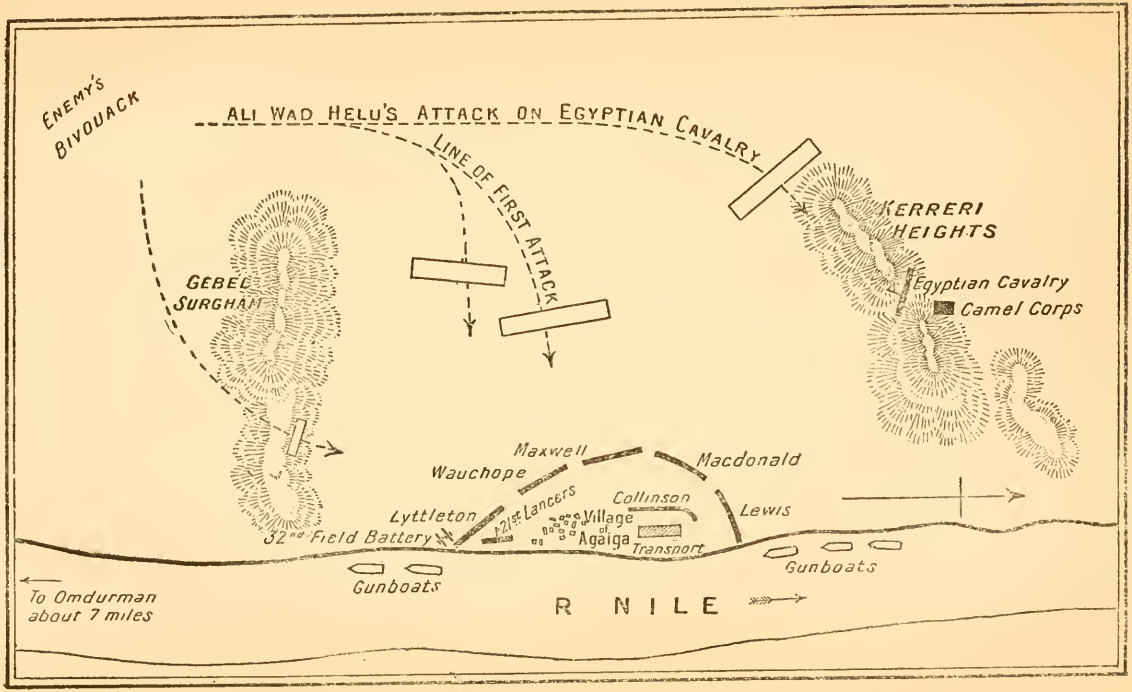
The force had formed up in position in the afternoon, when the Dervishes followed the cavalry home, and had remained under arms all night; at half-past five in the morning, when the first howitzer-shell from opposite Omdurman opened the day's work, every man was in his place. The line formed an obtuse angle; the order of brigades and battalions, counting from the left, was the following: Lyttelton's 2nd British (Rifle Brigade, Lancashire Fusiliers, Northumberland Fusiliers, Grenadier Guards); Wauchope's 1st British (Warwicks, Seaforths, Camerons, Lincolns); Maxwell's 2nd Egyptian (14th, 12th, 13th Sudanese,

and 8th Egyptian in support). Here came the point of the angle; to the right of it were: Macdonald's 1st Egyptian (11th, 10th, 9th Sudanese, 2nd Egyptian supporting); Lewis's 3rd Egyptian (4th, 15th, and 3rd and 7th Egyptian, in column on the right flank). Collinson's 4th Egyptian Brigade (1st, 5th, 17th, and 18th Egyptian) was in reserve in the village. All the Egyptian battalions in the front were in their usual formation, with four companies in line and two in support. The British had six in line and two in support.

On the extreme left was the 32nd Field Battery; the Maxims and Egyptian field-guns were mounted at intervals in the infantry line. The cavalry had gone out at the first streak of grey, British on the left, as usual, Egyptian with camel-corps and horse-battery from the right moving across our front. The gunboats lay with steam up off the village.

Light stole quietly into the sky behind us; there was no sound from the plain or the hills before us; there was hardly a sound from our own line. Everybody was very silent, but very curious. Would they be so mad as to come out and run their heads into our fire? It seemed beyond hoping for; yet certainly they had been full of war the day before. But most of us were expecting instantly the order to advance on Omdurman.

A trooper rose out of the dimness from behind the shoulder of Gebel Surgham, grew larger and plainer,



BATTLE OF OMDURMAN, PHASE ONE, 7 A.M

spurred violently up to the line and inside. A couple more were silhouetted across our front. Then the electric whisper came racing down the line; they were coming. The Lancers came in on the left; the Egyptian mounted troops drew like a curtain across us from left to right. As they passed a flicker of white flags began to extend and fill the front in their place. The noise of something began to creep in upon us; it cleared and divided into the tap of drums and the far-away surf of raucous war-cries. A shiver of expectancy thrilled along our army, and then a sigh of content. They were coming on. Allah help them! they were coming on.

It was now half-past six. The flags seemed still very distant, the roar very faint, and the thud of our first gun was almost startling. It may have startled them too, but it startled them into life. The line of flags swung forward, and a mass of white flying linen swung forward with it too. They came very fast, and they came very straight; and then presently they came no farther. With a crash the bullets leaped out of the British rifles. It began with the Guards and Warwicks —section volleys at 2000 yards; then, as the Dervishes edged rightward, it ran along to the Highlanders, the Lincolns, and to Maxwell's Brigade. The British stood up in double rank behind their zariba; the blacks lay down in their shelter-trench; both poured out death as fast as they could load and press trigger. Shrapnel whistled and Maxims growled savagely. From all the

line came perpetual fire, fire, fire, and shrieked forth in great gusts of destruction.

And the enemy? No white troops would have faced that torrent of death for five minutes, but the Baggara and the blacks came on. The torrent swept into them and hurled them down in whole companies. You saw a rigid line gather itself up and rush on evenly; then before a shrapnel shell or a Maxim the line suddenly quivered and stopped. The line was yet unbroken, but it was quite still. But other lines gathered up again, again, and yet again; they went down, and yet others rushed on. Sometimes they came near enough to see single figures quite plainly. One old man with a white flag started with five comrades; all dropped, but he alone came bounding forward to within 200 yards of the 14th Sudanese. Then he folded his arms across his face, and his limbs loosened, and he dropped sprawling to earth beside his flag.

It was the last day of Mahdism, and the greatest. They could never get near, and they refused to hold back. By now the ground before us was all white with dead men's drapery. Rifles grew red-hot; the soldiers seized them by the slings and dragged them back to the reserve to change for cool ones. It was not a battle, but an execution.

In the middle of it all you were surprised to find that we were losing men. The crash of our own fire was so prodigious that we could not hear their bullets

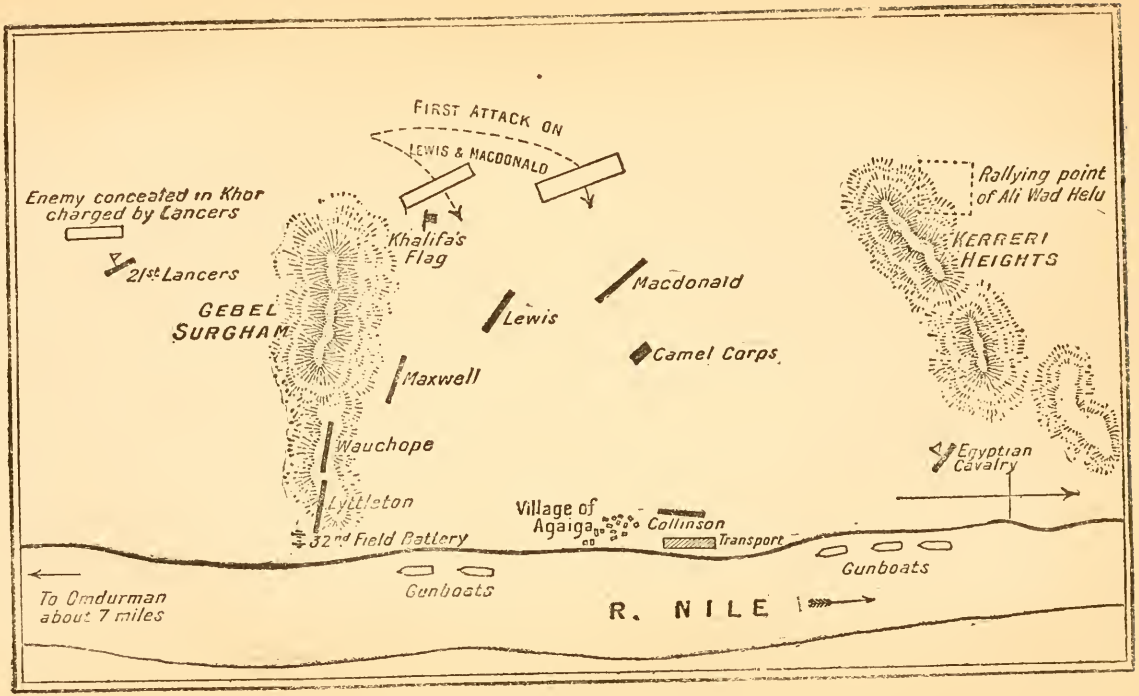
whistle; yet they came and swooped down and found victims. The Dervishes were firing at their extreme range, and their bullets were many of them almost spent; but as they always fire high they often hit. So that while you might have thought you were at a shoot of rabbits, you suddenly heard the sharp cry, "Bearer party there, quick," and a man was being borne rearward. Few went down, but there was a steady trickle to hospital. Bullets may have been spent, and Captain Caldecott, of the Warwicks, was one of the strongest men in the army; but that helped him nothing when the dropping ball took him in the temple and came out through the jugular. He lay an hour unconscious, then opened his eyes with "For God's sake, give me water!" and died as he drank. All mourned him for a smart officer and a winning comrade. Most of all the two Highland battalions dropped men. The zariba behind which they were unwisely posted obliged them to stand, besides hampering them both in fire and when it came to movement; a little clump of enemy gathered in a hole in front of them, and by the time guns came up to shell them out, the Camerons had lost some twenty-five and the Seaforths above a dozen.

But loss on this scale was not to be considered beside the awful slaughter of the Dervishes. If they still came on our men needed only time and ammunition and strength to point a rifle to kill them off to the very last man. Only by now—small wonder—

they were not coming on. They were not driven back; they were all killed in coming on. One section of fire after another hushed, and at eight o'clock the village and the plain were still again. The last shell had burst over the last visible group of Dervishes; now there was nothing but the unbending, grimly expectant line before Agaiga and the still carpet of white in front.

We waited half an hour or so, and then the sudden bugle called us to our feet. "Advance," it cried; "to Omdurman!" added we. Slowly the force broke up, and expanded. The evident intention was to march in echelon of brigades—the Second British leading along the river, the First British on their right rear, then Maxwell's, Lewis's, and Macdonald's, with Collinson's still supporting. Lewis and Macdonald had changed places, the latter being now outermost and rearmost; at the time few noticed that. The moment the dervish attack had died down the 21st Lancers had slipped out, and pushed straight for the Khalifa's capital.

Movement was slow, since the leading brigades had to wait till the others had gone far enough inland to take their positions. We passed over a corner of the field of fire, and saw for certain what awful slaughter we had done. The bodies were not in heaps—bodies hardly ever are; but they spread evenly over acres and acres. And it was very remarkable, if you remembered the Atbara, that you saw hardly a black;



BATTLE OF OMDURMAN, PHASE TWO, 9.40 A.M.

nearly all the dead had the high forehead and taper cheeks of the Arab. The Baggara had been met at last, and he was worth meeting. Some lay very composedly, with their slippers placed under their heads for a last pillow; some knelt, cut short in the middle of a last prayer. Others were torn to pieces, vermilion blood already drying on brown skin, killed instantly beyond doubt. Others, again, seemingly as dead as these, sprang up as we approached, and rushed savagely, hurling spears at the nearest enemy. They were bayoneted or shot. Once again the plain seemed empty, but for the advancing masses and the carpet of reddened white and broken bodies underfoot.

It was now twenty minutes to ten. The British had crested a low ridge between Gebel Surgham and the Nile; Maxwell's brigade was just ascending it, Lewis's just coming up under the hill. Men who could go where they liked were up with the British, staring hungrily at Omdurman. Suddenly from rearward broke out a heavy crackle of fire. We thought perhaps a dozen men or so had been shamming dead; we went on staring at Omdurman. But next instant we had to turn and gallop hot-heeled back again. For the crackle became a crashing, and the crashing waxed to a roar. Dervishes were firing at us from the top of Gebel Surgham, dervishes were firing behind and to the right of it. The 13th Sudanese were bounding up the hill; Lewis's brigade had hastily faced to its right westward, and was volleying for life; Mac-

donald's beyond, still facing northward, was a sheet of flashes and a roll of smoke. What was it? Had they come to life again? No time to ask; reinforcements or ghosts, they were on us, and the battle was begun all again.

To understand, you must hear now what we only heard afterwards. The dervish army, it appeared, had not returned to Omdurman on the night of the 1st, but had bivouacked—40,000 to 50,000 of them—behind Gebel Surgham, south-westward from Agaiga. The Khalifa had doubtless expected a sudden attack at daybreak, as at Firket, at Abu Hamed, on the Atbara; as we marched by night to our positions before Omdurman he must have designed to spring upon our right flank. When day broke and no enemy appeared he divided his army into three corps. The first, under Osman Azrak, attacked the village; the second, with the green banner of Ali Wad Helu—with him Abdullahi's eldest son, the Sheik-ed-Din—moved towards Kerreri Heights to envelop our right; the third, under Abdullahi himself and his brother Yakub, remained behind Surgham, ready, as need might be, to envelop our left, or to act as reserve and bar our road to Omdurman.

What befell the first you know; Osman Azrak died with them. The second spread out towards our right, and there it fell in with the Egyptian cavalry, horse-battery, and camel-corps. When Broadwood Bey fell back before the attack, he sent word of its coming to

the Sirdar, and received orders to remain outside the trench and keep the enemy in front, instead of letting them get round the right. Accordingly he occupied the Heights of Kerreri. But the moment he got to the top he found himself in face of Wad Helu's unsuspected army-corps—12,000 to 15,000 men against less than 2000—and the moment he saw them they began swarming up the hill. There was just a moment for decision, but one moment is all that a born cavalry general needs. The next his galloper was flying with the news to the Sirdar, and the mounted troops were retreating northward. The choice lay between isolation, annihilation, or retreat on Agaiga and envelopment of the right. Broadwood chose the first, but even for that the time was short enough. The camels floundered on the rocky hillside; the guns dragged; the whole mass of dervishes pursued them with a pelting fire. Two guns lost all their horses and were abandoned; the camel-corps alone had over sixty men hit. As for the cavalry, they went back very hard pressed, covering their comrades' retreat and their own by carbine fire. If the Egyptian army but gave Victoria Crosses, there were many earned that day. Man after man rode back to bring in dismounted officers, and would hardly be dissuaded from their endeavour when it was seen the rescued were plainly dead. It was the great day of trial—the day the pick of our cavalry officers have worked for through a weary decade and more—and the Fayum fellah fought like a

hero and died like a man. One or two short of forty killed and wounded was the day's loss; but they came off handsomely. The army of the green flag was now on Kerreri Heights, between them and the camp; but with Broadwood's force unbroken behind it, it paused from the meditated attack on the Egyptian right. In the pause three of the five gunboats caught it, and pepper-castored it over with shell and Maxim fire. It withdrew from the river towards the centre again: the instant a way was cleared the out-paced camel-corps was passed back to Agaiga. The cavalry hung upon the green flag's left, till they withdrew clean westward and inland; then it moved placidly back to the infantry again.

Thus much for the right; on the left the British cavalry were in the stress of an engagement, less perfectly conducted, even more hardily fought out. They left the zariba, as you heard, the moment the attack burned out, and pricked eagerly off to Omdurman. Verging somewhat westward, to the rear of Gebel Surgham, they came on 300 Dervishes. Their scouts had been over the ground a thousand yards ahead of them, and it was clear for a charge. Only to cut them off it was thought better to get a little west of them, then left wheel, and thus gallop down on them and drive them away from their supports. The trumpets sang out the order, the troops glided into squadrons, and, four squadrons in line, the 21st Lancers swung into their first charge.

Knee to knee they swept on till they were but 200 yards from the enemy. Then suddenly — then in a flash—they saw the trap. Between them and the 300 there yawned suddenly a deep ravine; out of the ravine there sprang instantly a cloud of dark heads and a brandished lightning of swords, and a thunder of savage voices. Mahmud smiled when he heard the tale in prison at Halfa, and said it was their favourite stratagem. It had succeeded. Three thousand, if there was one, to a short four hundred; but it was too late to check now. Must go through with it now! The blunders of British cavalry are the fertile seed of British glory: knee to knee the Lancers whirled on. One hundred yards—fifty—knee to knee——

Slap! "It was just like that," said a captain, bringing his fist hard into his open palm. Through the swordsmen they shore without checking—and then came the khor. The colonel at their head, riding straight through everything without sword or revolver drawn, found his horse on its head, and the swords swooping about his own. He got the charger up again, and rode on straight, unarmed, through everything. The squadrons followed him down the fall. Horses plunged, blundered, recovered, fell; dervishes on the ground lay for the hamstringing cut; officers pistolled them in passing over, as one drops a stone into a bucket; troopers thrust till lances broke, then cut; everybody went on straight, through everything.

And through everything clean out the other side

they came — those that kept up or got up in time. The others were on the ground—in pieces by now, for the cruel swords shore through shoulder and thigh, and carved the dead into fillets. Twenty-four of these, and of those that came out over fifty had felt sword or bullet or spear. Few horses stayed behind among the swords, but nearly 130 were wounded. Lieutenant Robert Grenfell's troop came on a place with a jump out as well as a jump in; it lost officer, centre guide, and both flank guides, ten killed, and eleven wounded. Yet, when they burst straggling out, their only thought was to rally and go in again. "Rally, No. 2!" yelled a sergeant, so mangled across the face that his body was a cascade of blood, and nose and cheeks flapped hideously as he yelled. "Fall out, sergeant, you're wounded," said the subaltern of his troop. "No, no, sir; fall in!" came the hoarse answer; and the man reeled in his saddle. "Fall in, No. 2; fall in. Where are the devils? Show me the devils!" And No. 2 fell in—four whole men out of twenty.

They chafed and stamped and blasphemed to go through them again, though the colonel wisely forbade them to face the pit anew. There were gnashings of teeth and howls of speechless rage—things half theatrical, half brutal to tell of when blood has cooled, yet things to rejoice over, in that they show the fighting devil has not, after all, been civilised out of Britons.

Also there are many and many deeds of self-abandoning heroism; of which tale the half will never be told. Take only one. Lieutenant de Montmorency missed his troop-sergeant, and rode back among the slashes to look for him. There he found the hacked body of Lieutenant Grenfell. He dismounted, and put it up on his horse, not seeing, in his heat, that life had drained out long since by a dozen channels. The horse bolted under the slackened muscles, and De Montmorency was left alone with his revolver and 3000 screaming fiends. Captain Kenna and Corporal Swarbrick rode out, caught his horse, and brought it back; the three answered the fire of the 3000 at fifty yards, and got quietly back to their own line untouched.

Forbearing a second charge, the Lancers dismounted and opened fire; the carbines at short range took an opulent vengeance for the lost. Back, back, back they drove them, till they came into the fire of the 32nd Battery. The shrapnel flew shrieking over them; the 3000 fell all ways, and died.

All this from hearsay; now to go back to what we saw. When the Sirdar moved his brigades southward he knew what he was doing. He was giving his right to an unbeaten enemy; with his usual daring he made it so. His game now was to get between the dervishes and Omdurman. Perhaps he did not guess what a bellyful of beating the un-

beaten enemy would take; but he trusted to his generals and his star, and, as always, they bore him to victory.

The blacks of the 13th Battalion were storming Gebel Surgham. Lewis and Macdonald, facing west and south, had formed a right angle. They were receiving the fire of the Khalifa's division, and the charge of the Khalifa's horsemen; behind these the Khalifa's huge black standard was flapping raven-like. The Baggara horsemen were few and ill-mounted—perhaps 200 altogether—but they rode to get home or die. They died. There was a time when one galloping Baggara would have chased a thousand Egyptians, but that time is very long past. The fellaheen stood like a wall, and aimed steadily at the word; the chargers swerved towards Macdonald. The blacks, as cool as any Scotsmen, stood and aimed likewise; the last Baggara fell at the muzzles of the rifles. Our fire went on, steady, remorseless. The Remington bullets piped more and more rarely overhead, and the black heads thinned out in front. A second time the attack guttered and flickered out. It was just past ten. Once more to Omdurman!

Two minutes' silence. Then once more the howling storm rushed down upon us; once more crashed forth the answering tempest. This time it burst upon Macdonald alone—from the north-westward upon his right flank, spreading and gathering to his right rear. For all their sudden swiftness of movement the Dervishes

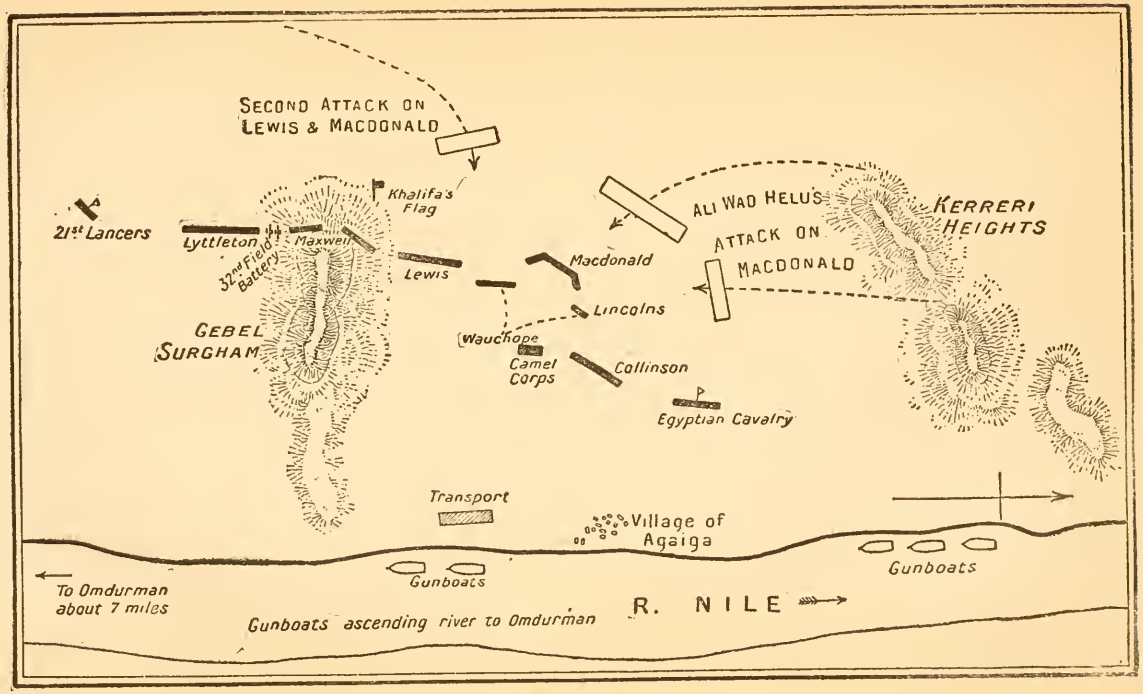
throughout this day never lost their formation; their lines drove on as rigidly as ours, regiment alongside regiment in lines of six and eight and a dozen ranks, till you might have fancied the Macedonian phalanx was alive again. Left and front and right and rear the masses ate up the desert—12,000 unbroken fast and fearless warriors leaping round 3000.

Now began the fiercest fight of that fierce day. The Khalifa brought up his own black banner again; his staunchest die-hards drove it into the earth and locked their ranks about it. The green flag danced encouragement to the Allah-intoxicated battalions of Wad Helu and the Sheikh-ed-Din. It was victory or Paradise now.

For us it was victory or shredded flesh and bones unburied, crackling under the red slippers of Baggara victors. It was the very crux and crisis of the fight. If Macdonald went, Lewis on his left and Collinson and the supporting camel-corps and the newly returned cavalry, all on his right or rear, must all go too. The Second British and Second Egyptian Brigades were far off by now, advancing by the left of Surgham hill; if they had to be recalled the Khalifa could walk back into his stronghold, and then all our fighting was to begin anew. But Hunter Pasha was there and Macdonald Bey was there, born fighting men both, whom no danger can flurry and no sudden shift in the kaleidoscope of battle disconcert. Hunter sent for Wauchope's first British Brigade to fill the

gap between Macdonald and Lewis. The order went to General Gatacre first instead of to the Sirdar: with the soldier's instinct he set the brigade moving on the instant. The khaki columns faced round and edged rightward, rightward till the fighting line was backed with 3000 Lee-Metfords, which no man on earth could face and live. Later the Lincolns were moved farther still on to Macdonald's right. They dispute with the Warwicks the title of the best shooting regiment in the British army; the men they shot at will dispute no claim of the Lincolns for ever.

But the cockpit of the fight was Macdonald's. The British might avenge his brigade; it was his to keep it and to kill off the attack. To meet it he turned his front through a complete half-circle, facing successively south, west, and north. Every tactician in the army was delirious in his praise: the ignorant correspondent was content to watch the man and his blacks. "Cool as on parade," is an old phrase; Macdonald Bey was very much cooler. Beneath the strong, square-hewn face you could tell that the brain was working as if packed in ice. He sat solid on his horse, and bent his black brows towards the green flag and the Remingtons. Then he turned to a galloper with an order, and cantered easily up to a battalion-commander. Magically the rifles hushed, the stinging powder smoke wisped away, and the companies were rapidly threading back and forward, round and round, in and out, as if it were a figure



BATTLE OF OMDURMAN, PHASE THREE, 10.10 A.M.

of a dance. In two minutes the brigade was together again in a new place. The field in front was hastening towards us in a whitey-brown cloud of dervishes. An order. Macdonald's jaws gripped and hardened as the flame spurted out again, and the whitey-brown cloud quivered and stood still. He saw everything; knew what to do; knew how to do it; did it. At the fire he was ever brooding watchfully behind his firing-line; at the cease fire he was instantly in front of it: all saw him, and knew that they were being nursed to triumph.

His blacks of the 9th, 10th, and 11th, the historic fighting regiments of the Egyptian army, were worthy of their chief. The 2nd Egyptian, brigaded with them and fighting in the line, were worthy of their comrades, and of their own reputation as the best disciplined battalion in the world. A few had feared that the blacks would be too forward, the yellows too backward: except that the blacks, as always, looked happier, there was no difference at all between them. The Egyptians sprang to the advance at the bugle; the Sudanese ceased fire in an instant silence at the whistle. They were losing men, too, for though eyes were clamped on the dervish charges, the dervish fire was brisk. Man after man dropped out behind the firing-line. Here was a white officer with a red-lathered charger; there a black stretched straight, bare-headed in the sun, dry-lipped, uncomplaining, a bullet through his liver; two yards away a dead

driver by a dead battery mule, his whip still glued in his hand. The table of loss topped 100—150—neared 200. Still they stood, fired, advanced, fired, changed front, fired—firing, firing always, deaf in the din, blind in the smarting smoke, hot, dry, bleeding, bloodthirsty, enduring the devilish fight to the end.

And the Dervishes? The honour of the fight must still go with the men who died. Our men were perfect, but the Dervishes were superb—beyond perfection. It was their largest, best, and bravest army that ever fought against us for Mahdism, and it died worthily of the huge empire that Mahdism won and kept so long. Their riflemen, mangled by every kind of death and torment that man can devise, clung round the black flag and the green, emptying their poor, rotten, home-made cartridges dauntlessly. Their spearmen charged death at every minute hopelessly. Their horsemen led each attack, riding into the bullets till nothing was left but three horses trotting up to our line, heads down, saying, "For goodness' sake, let us in out of this." Not one rush, or two, or ten—but rush on rush, company on company, never stopping, though all their view that was not unshaken enemy was the bodies of the men who had rushed before them. A dusky line got up and stormed forward: it bent, broke up, fell apart, and disappeared. Before the smoke had cleared, another line was bending and storming forward in the same track.

It was over. The avenging squadrons of the Egyp-

tian cavalry swept over the field. The Khalifa and the Sheikh-ed-Din had galloped back to Omdurman. Ali Wad Helu was borne away on an angareb with a bullet through his thigh-bone. Yakub lay dead under his brother's banner. From the green army there now came only death-enamoured desperadoes, strolling one by one towards the rifles, pausing to shake a spear, turning aside to recognise a corpse, then, caught by a sudden jet of fury, bounding forward, checking, sinking limply to the ground. Now under the black flag in a ring of bodies stood only three men, facing the three thousand of the Third Brigade. They folded their arms about the staff and gazed steadily forward. Two fell. The last dervish stood up and filled his chest; he shouted the name of his God and hurled his spear. Then he stood quite still, waiting. It took him full; he quivered, gave at the knees, and toppled with his head on his arms and his face towards the legions of his conquerors.

XXXIII.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.

Over 11,000 killed, 16,000 wounded, 4000 prisoners, —that was the astounding bill of dervish casualties officially presented after the battle of Omdurman. Some people had estimated the whole dervish army at 1000 less than this total: few had put it above 50,000. The Anglo-Egyptian army on the day of battle numbered, perhaps, 22,000 men: if the Allies had done the same proportional execution at Waterloo, not one Frenchman would have escaped.

How the figures of wounded were arrived at I do not know. The wounded of a dervish army ought not really to be counted at all, since the badly wounded die and the slightly wounded are just as dangerous as if they were whole. It is conceivable that some of the wounded may have been counted twice over—either as dead, when they were certain to perish of their wounds or of thirst, or else as prisoners when they gave themselves up. Yet, with all the deductions that moderation can suggest, it was

a most appalling slaughter. The dervish army was killed out as hardly an army has been killed out in the history of war.

It will shock you, but it was simply unavoidable. Not a man was killed except resisting — very few except attacking. Many wounded were killed, it is true, but that again was absolutely unavoidable. At the very end of the battle, when Macdonald's brigade was advancing after its long fight, the leading files of the 9th Sudanese passed by a young Baggara who was not quite dead. In a second he was up and at the nearest mounted white officer. The first spear flew like a streak, but just missed. The officer assailed put a man-stopping revolver bullet into him, but it did not stop him. He whipped up another spear, and only a swerve in the saddle saved the Englishman's body at the expense of a wounded right hand. This happened not once but a hundred times, and all over the field. It was impossible not to kill the dervishes: they refused to go back alive. At the very finish — the 11,000 killed, the Khalifa fled, the army hopelessly smashed to pieces —a band of some 3000 men stood firm against the pursuing Egyptian cavalry. "They were very sticky," said an officer simply, "and we couldn't take 'em on." Later they admitted they were beaten, and came in. But except for sheer weariness of our troops, that 3000 would have been added to the eleven. As it was, they outmarched our advance, slipped into Omdurman

before us, changed their gibbas, and looted the Khalifa's dhurra.

Nor was that the end of the sullen resistance of the Baggara. Even after they realised that they were hopelessly beaten in the field, they relaxed but little of their sullen hostility. Probably they were encouraged by the Sirdar's moderation in sparing indiscriminately all the inhabitants of Omdurman: whether that or no, it is certain that from the day of the fight to the 8th, the day I came down, it was not safe for any white man to go into the city unarmed. I do not think any white man was actually attacked,—certainly none was killed. But wandering Egyptian soldiers were, and it was not until a batch or two of francs-tirailleurs had been taken out and shot that decent order could be maintained in the town. That was natural enough. Omdurman's only idea of maintaining order was massacre: how could it appreciate mercy?

By the side of the immense slaughter of dervishes, the tale of our casualties is so small as to be almost ridiculous. The first official list was this. British troops: 2 officers (Captain Caldecott and Lieut. Grenfell) killed, 7 wounded; 23 non-commissioned officers and men killed, 99 wounded. Egyptian army: 5 British officers and 1 non-commissioned officer wounded; 1 native officer killed, 8 wounded; 20 non-commissioned officers and men killed, 221 wounded. Total casualties: 131 British, 256 native—387.

But this estimate, like all early estimates, was under the mark. Some of the wounded died—among them a private of the Lincolns not previously reported; others were late in reporting themselves. The Egyptian casualties among non-commissioned officers and men rose to 30 killed and 279 wounded. Among the British many slight wounds were never reported at all. The 21st Lancers, especially, according to the testimony of their own officers, lost 24 killed or died of wounds, and 74 wounded. Of the latter, hardly more than half came under surgical treatment at all. Such wounds, of course, were very slight, and were properly omitted from the official list. Still, if you count every scratch, the British casualties go up to nearly 200, and the Egyptian to over 300. Of the British infantry, the Camerons, with a total of 2 killed and 25 wounded, lost most severely, as they did at Atbara; and they were again followed by the Seaforths with 2 killed and 16 wounded.

Putting it at its highest, however, the victory was even more incredibly cheap than the Atbara. But for the rash handling of the 21st Lancers, the mistake of putting the British infantry behind a zariba instead of a trench, and the curious perversity which sent the slow camel-corps out into the open with the Egyptian cavalry, the losses would have been more insignificant still. The enemy's fire, as always, was too high, and the Egyptians in their shelter-trench hardly suffered from it at all. Perhaps the heaviest fire of the first

part of the action was borne by Collinson's supporting brigade and by the hospitals. In the second action, Macdonald's four battalions suffered most severely of any in the field—again, as at the Atbara.

Among correspondents, the Hon. Hubert Howard, acting for the 'Times' and the 'New York Herald' in conjunction, was killed by a chance shot at the gate of the Mahdi's tomb at the very end of the day. From Oxford onward his one end in life had been the wooing of adventures. He had found them with the Cuban insurgents and in the Matabele rebellion, where he was wounded in leading a charge of Cape boys. He was foredoomed from the cradle to die in his boots, and asked no better. Earlier in the day he had ridden with the Lancers through their charge; earlier still he had been out with the pickets and jumped his horse over the zariba as the dervishes came on to attack it. No man ever born was more insensible to fear. Ten minutes before he was killed he said, "This is the best day of my life."

Colonel Frank Rhodes, the formally accredited correspondent of the 'Times,' was shot through the flesh of the right shoulder very early in the fight. From the very beginning no Sudan campaign has been complete without Colonel Rhodes, and it must have been a keen disappointment to him to miss Omdurman; but he bore that and the wound with his usual humorous fortitude. Mr Williams, of the 'Daily Chronicle,' had his cheek abraded by a bullet or a chip

of masonry from a ricochet: it was nothing, and he made of it even less than it was. Mr Cross, of the 'Manchester Guardian,' died afterwards of enteric fever at Abeidieh. Years ago he had rowed in the Oxford Eight, but enteric delights in seizing the most powerful frames. Quiet, gentle, patient, brave, sincere—Mr Cross was the type of an English gentleman.

However, the battle of Omdurman was almost a miracle of success. For that thanks are due, first, to the Khalifa, whose generalship throughout was a masterpiece of imbecility. Had he attacked us at night with the force and impetuous courage he showed by day, it was not at all impossible that he might have got inside our position. Nothing could have come alive up to the Lee-Metfords; but the Martinis might have proved less irresistible—and once inside in the dark his death-scorning fanatics would have punished us fearfully. At close fighting they would have been as good as we, and far more numerous: if they had been met with rifle-fire, we must have inevitably shot hundreds of our own men.

If he had stood in Omdurman and fought as well as he fought in the open, our loss must needs have been reckoned in thousands instead of hundreds. Instead, he chose the one form of fight which gave him no possibility of even a partial success. We heard he boasted that his men always had broken our squares, and he would see if they could not do it again. They would have broken us if valour could have done it

but he forgot that the squares were bigger than before, were better armed, so far as the British went, and especially that men like the Sirdar and Hunter and Macdonald knew every turn and twist of dervish tactics, and are not in the habit of giving points away to the enemy.

The Khalifa, therefore, came to utter grief as a general. As a ruler he fought harder than many had expected of him; even when the mass of his army was dead or yielded, he was ready for one throw more. When that failed, he rode for it: suicide would have been more dignified, as well as simpler for us, but besides suicide there was only flight open to him. Perhaps suicide would have been simpler for him too in the end. As a ruler he finished when he rode out of Omdurman. His own pampered Baggara killed his herdsmen and looted the cattle that were to feed him. Somebody betrayed the position of the reserve camels that were to carry his reserve wives: the camel-corps brought them in, and with them Fatima—the Sheikh-ed-Din's mother—an enormous lady, his faithful and candid chief partner from the days when he could carry all his property on a donkey. Other wives, less staunch, voluntarily deserted him; his followers took to killing one another.

He is no more Khalifa. He evaded the pursuit of the cavalry, however, joined the Sheikh-ed-Din, who had fled by a different route, and struck south-westward. He may reach his own country, and if, from

an Emperor, he likes to pass into a petty bandit, he may possibly have a few months yet before him. But his following is too small even for successful brigandage; and he has earned too general detestation. Any day his head may be brought into Omdurman. Last month he was the arbitrary master of one of the greatest dominions—looking only to extent of country—in the whole world. To-day he is merely a criminal at large.

The remainder of his forces took little reduction. Major Stuart Wortley had cleared the right bank up to the Blue Nile. Luckily for him, the opposition was not severe, for most of the friendlies bolted at sight of a Baggara, as everybody knew they would. The Jaalin, however, behaved well.

There now remained only one dervish force in the field—the garrison of Gedaref, up the Blue Nile and on the Abyssinian border. It numbered 3000 men, under Ahmed Fadil, the Khalifa's cousin. The reduction of this body was left to Parsons Pasha, Governor of Kassala, and he executed his task brilliantly. The details of the action are not yet known; perhaps nobody will ever take the trouble to ask them. The main fact is, that Parsons, with the 16th Egyptian battalion, the Arab Kassala Regulars (under two British Bimbashis), some camel-corps and irregulars —in all 1300 men—attacked Ahmed Fadil's 3000, and after three hours' fighting dispersed them. They lost 700 killed; Parsons's casualties were 37 men killed,

4 native officers and 53 men wounded. Osman Digna was believed to have fled in this direction, but no word has yet come in about him. We are not likely to hear much more about Osman Digna.

For a point or two of criticism—if the unprofessional observer may allow himself the liberty—the battle of Omdurman was a less brilliant affair than the Atbara: on the other hand, it was more complex, more like a modern battle. The Atbara took more fighting, Omdurman more generalship. Success in each was complete and crushing. Omdurman was final; but it occurred to a good many of us between 10 and 11 that morning that it was just as well we had put Mahmud's 16,000 out of harm's way at the Atbara. That these were not at the Khalifa's disposal on September 2nd was one more of his blunders, one piece more of the Sirdar's luck.

The Sirdar would have won in any case: that he won so crushingly and so cheaply was the gift of luck and the Khalifa. Three distinct mistakes—as has, perhaps impertinently, been hinted above—were made on our side. Of these the charge of the 21st Lancers was the most flagrant. It is perhaps an unfortunate consequence of the modern development of war-correspondence, and the general influence of popular feeling on every branch of our Government, that what the street applauds the War Office is compelled at least to condone. The populace has glorified the charge of the

21st for its indisputable heroism; the War Office will hardly be able to condemn it for its equally indisputable folly. That being so, it is the less invidious to say that the charge was a gross blunder. For cavalry to charge unbroken infantry, of unknown strength, over unknown ground, within a mile of their own advancing infantry, was as grave a tactical crime as cavalry could possibly commit. Their orders, it is believed, were to find out the strength of the enemy south of Gebel Surgham, report to the British infantry behind them, and, if possible, to prevent the enemy from re-entering Omdurman. The charge implied disregard, or at least inversion, of these orders. Had the cavalry merely reconnoitred the body of dervishes they attacked, and kept them occupied till Lyttelton's brigade came up, the enemy would have been annihilated, probably without the loss of a man to our side. As it was, the British cavalry in the charge itself suffered far heavier loss than it inflicted. And by its loss in horses it practically put itself out of action for the rest of the day, when it ought to have saved itself for the pursuit. Thereby it contributed as much as any one cause to the escape of the Khalifa.

For the other two points, General Gatacre, being new to zaribas, appears to have throughout attached undue importance to them. At the Atbara he squandered much of the force of his attack through an overestimation of the difficulty of Mahmud's zariba; here

he crippled both defence and readiness of offence through overestimating the difficulty of his own. A zariba looks far more formidable than a light shelter-trench such as General Hunter's division employed. in truth it is as easy to shoot through as a sheet of paper, and, for Sudanis, almost as easy to charge through. As for sending out the camel-corps with the Egyptian cavalry, it is exceedingly difficult to understand why this was done the very day after Broadwood's reconnaissance to Gebel Feried had demonstrated their immobility. The truth appears to be that it is very difficult to find a place for such a force in a general action. When the frontier was Halfa, and the war was mostly desert raids and counter-raids, nothing could have replaced this corps; for other than desert work it has become something of an anomaly.

These amateur criticisms are put forward with diffidence, and will, I hope, be tentatively received. Turning to what is indisputable, it is impossible to overpraise the conduct of every branch of the force. Those of the longest and widest experience said over and over again that they had never seen a battle in which everybody was so completely cool and set on his business. Two features were especially prominent. The first was the shooting of the British. It was perfect. Some thought that the Dervishes were mown down principally by artillery and Maxim fire; but if

the gun did more execution than the rifle, it was probably for the first time in the history of war. An examination of the dead — cursory and partial, but probably fairly representative—tends to the opinion that most of the killing, as usual, was done by rifles. From the British you heard not one ragged volley: every section fired with a single report. The individual firing was lively and evenly maintained. The satisfactory conclusion is that the British soldier will keep absolutely steady in action, and knows how to use his weapon: given these two conditions, no force existing will ever get within half a mile of him on open ground, and hardly any will try.

The native troops vindicated their courage, discipline, and endurance most nobly. The sudden, unforeseen charges might well have shaken the nerve of the Egyptians and over-excited the blacks; both were absolutely cool. Their only fault was in shooting. At almost every volley you saw a bullet kick the sand within fifty yards of the firing-line. Others flew almost perpendicular into the air. Still, given steadiness, the mechanical art of shooting can be taught with time and patience. When you consider that less than six months ago the equivalent of one company in each black battalion were raw dervishes, utterly untrained in the use of fire-arms, the wonder is they shot as well as they did. Anyhow they shot well enough, and in trying circumstances they shot

as well as they knew how. That is the root of the matter.

As for the leading — happy the country which possessed a Hunter, a Macdonald, a Broadwood, and had hardly heard of any one of them. It has heard of them now, and it will be strange if it does not presently hear further.

XXXIV.

OMDURMAN.

It was eleven o'clock. Four brigades were passing slowly to right and left of Gebel Surgham: the Second British and Second Egyptian were far ahead, filmy shadows on the eye-searing sand. The dervish dead and dying were strewn already over some thirty square miles—killed by bullets, killed by shrapnel, killed by shell from the gunboats, dying of wounds by the water, dying of thirst in the desert. But most lay dead in the fighting line. Mahdism had died well. If it had earned its death by its iniquities, it had condoned its iniquities by its death.

Now on to overtake the Sirdar, to see the city of the Khalifa. Even now, after our triple fight, none was quite assured of final victory. We had killed a prodigious number of men, but where there were so many there might yet be more. Probably the same thought ran through many minds. If only they fought as well inside Omdurman! That would have spelt days of fighting and thousands of dead.

One thing, indeed, we knew by now: the defences of Omdurman on the river side existed no longer. On the 1st, from Gebel Feried, we had seen the gun-boats begin the bombardment, backed by the 37th Battery, with its howitzers, on the opposite bank. We had heard since of the effects. "It was the funniest thing you ever saw," said a captain of marines. "The boats went up one after another; when we got opposite the first fort, 'pop' went their guns. 'Bang, bang, bang,' went three boats and stopped up the embrasure. Came to the next fort: 'pop'; 'bang, bang, bang': stopped up that embrasure. So on all the way up. A little fort on Tuti Island had the cheek to loose off its pop-gun; stopped that up. Then we went on to Khartum. Forts there thought perhaps the boats couldn't shoot from behind, so they lay doggo till we had gone past. They found we could shoot from behind."

So far so good. But what should we find on the land side? Above all, should we find the Khalifa? The only answer was to go and see. Four miles or so south of Agaiga the yellow streak of Khor Shamba marks roughly the northern limit of Omdurman; thence to the Mahdi's tomb, the great mosque, and the Khalifa's house is a short three miles. The Second British Brigade was watering at the Khor—men and horses lapping up the half solid stuff till they must have been as thick with mud inside as they were out. Beyond it a sprinkling of tumble-down huts refracted

and heated sevenfold the furnace of the sunlight; from among them beckoned the Sirdar's flag.

It was about two o'clock when the red flag moved onward towards the Mahdi's tomb, heaving its torn dome above the sea of mud walls. The red and white looked light and gay beside the huge, cumbrous raven-banner of the Khalifa, which flew sullenly at its side Before the twin emblems of victory and defeat rode the straight-backed Sirdar, General Hunter a head behind him, behind them the staff. Behind came the trampling 2nd Egyptian Brigade and the deadly smooth-gliding guns of the 32nd Battery. Through the sparse hovels they moved on; presently they began to densen into streets. We were on the threshold of the capital of Mahdism.

And on the threshold came out an old man on a donkey with a white flag. The Khalifa — so we believed — had fled to Omdurman, and was at this very moment within his wall in the centre of the town; but the inhabitants had come out to surrender. Only one point the old gentleman wished to be assured of: were we likely to massacre everybody if we let them in without resistance? The Sirdar thought not. The old man beamed at the answer, and conveyed it to his fellow-townsmen; on the top of which ceremony we marched into Omdurman.

It began just like any other town or village of the mean Sudan. Half the huts seemed left unfinished, the other half to have been deserted and fallen to

pieces. There were no streets, no doors or windows except holes, usually no roofs. As for a garden, a tree, a steading for a beast—any evidence of thrift or intelligence, any attempt at comfort or amenity or common cleanliness,—not a single trace of any of it. Omdurman was just planless confusion of blind walls and gaping holes, shiftless stupidity, contented filth and beastliness.

But that, we said, was only the outskirts: when we come farther in we shall surely find this mass of population manifesting some small symbols of a great dominion. And presently we came indeed into a broader way than the rest—something with the rude semblance of a street. Only it was paved with dead donkeys, and here and there it disappeared in a cullender of deep holes where green water festered. Beside it stood a few houses, such as you see in Metemmeh or Berber—two large, naked rooms standing in a naked walled courtyard. Even these were rare: for the rest, in this main street, Omdurman was a rabbit-warren—a threadless labyrinth of tiny huts or shelters, too flimsy for the name of sheds. Oppression, stagnation, degradation, were stamped deep on every yard of miserable Omdurman.

But the people! We could hardly see the place for the people. We could hardly hear our own voices for their shrieks of welcome. We could hardly move for their importunate greetings. They tumbled over each other like ants from every mud heap, from behind every

dunghill, from under every mat. Most of the men still wore their gibbas turned inside out; you could see the shadows of the patches through the sackcloth. They had been trying to kill us three hours before. But they salaamed, none the less, and volleyed "Peace be with you" in our track. All the miscellaneous tribes of Arabs whom Abdullahi's fears or suspicions had congregated in his capital, all the blacks his captains had gathered together into franker slavery—indiscriminate, half-naked, grinning the grin of the sycophant, they held out their hands and asked for backsheesh.

Yet more wonderful were the women. The multitude of women whom concupiscence had harried from every recess of Africa and mewed up in Baggara harems came out to salute their new masters. There were at least three of them to every man. Black women from Equatoria and almost white women from Egypt, plum-skinned Arabs and a strange yellow type with square, bony faces and tightly-ringleted black hair; old women and little girls and mothers with babies at the breast; women who could hardly walk for dyed cotton swathings, muffled in close veils, and women with only a rag between themselves and nakedness—the whole city was a huge harem, a museum of African races, a monstrosity of African lust.

The steady columns drove through the surge of people: then halted in lines of ebony statues, the open-mouthed guns crawling between them to the

front. We had come opposite the corner of a high wall of faced stones, a high twenty feet solid without a chip or chink. Now! This was the great wall of Omdurman, the Khalifa's citadel. And listen! Boom—boom—a heavy melancholy note, half bellow, half wail. It was the great ombeya, the war-horn. The Khalifa was inside, and he was rallying the malazemin of his bodyguard to fight their last fight in their last stronghold.

Less than 3000 men were standing, surrounded by ten times their number, within ten feet of this gigantic wall. But for the moment they were safe enough. The Khalifa, demented in all he did through these last days of his perdition, had made no banquette inside his rampart; and if it was hard to scale, it was impossible to defend. The pinch would come when we went inside.

One column moved off along the street; another—the 13th Sudanese with four guns of the battery—away to the left under the wall towards the Nile. The road was what you already felt to be typical of Mahdism—pools of rank stagnation, hills and chasms of rubble. The guns fell behind to cut their road a bit; the infantry went on till they came down to the brimming blue river. Here were the forts and the loopholed walls, and here, steaming serene and masterful to and fro, were the inevitable gunboats. Cr-r-rack! Three crisp Maxim rounds: the place was tenanted yet.

At the corner we come upon a breach—500 cubic feet or so of fissure—torn by a lyddite shell. Over the rubble we scrambled, then through a stout double-leafed gate, pulses leaping: we were inside. But as yet only half inside—only in a broad road between another high stone wall on our right and the river on our left. We saw the choked embrasures and a maimed gun or two, and walls so clownishly loop-holed that a man could only get one oblique shot at a gun-boat, and then wait till the next came up to have one shot at that. We saw worse things—horrors such as do not sicken in the mass on the battle-field—a scarlet man sitting with his chin on his knees, hit by a shell, clothed from head to foot in his own blood,—a woman, young and beautifully formed, stark naked, rolling from side to side, moaning. As yet we saw not one fighting man, and still we could feel that the place was alive. We pushed on between walls, we knew not whither, through breathing emptiness, through pulsing silence.

Round a corner we came suddenly on a bundle of dirty patched cloth and dirty, lean, black limbs—a typical dervish. He was alive and unarmed, and threw up his hands: he was taken for a guide. Next at our feet, cutting the road, we found a broad khor, flowing in from the Nile, washing up above the base of the wall. Four dervishes popped out, seemingly from dead walls beyond. They came towards us and probably wished to surrender; but the blacks fired, and they dived into their dead walls again. The guide

said the water was not deep, and a crowd of men and women suddenly shooting up from the rear bore him out by fording it. Most of these new-reconciled foes had baskets to take away their late master's loot. We plashed through the water—and here at last, in the face of the high wall on our right, was a great wooden gate. Six blacks stood by with the bayonet, while another beat it open with his rifle-butt. We stepped inside and gasped with wonder and disappointment.

For the inside of the Kalifa's own enclosure was even more squalid, an even more wonderful teeming beehive than the outer town itself. Like all tyrants, he was constantly increasing his body-guard, till the fortified enclosure was bursting with them. From the height of a saddle you could see that this was only part of the citadel, an enclosure within an enclosure. Past a little guard-house at the gate a narrow path ran up the centre of it; all the rest was a chaos of piggish dwelling-holes. Tiny round straw tukls, mats propped up a foot from earth with crooked sticks, dome-topped mud kennels that a man could just crawl into, exaggerated bird's nests falling to pieces of stick and straw—lucky was the man of the Khalifa's guard who could house himself and his family in a mud cabin the size of an omnibus. On every side, of every type, they jumbled and jostled and crushed; and they sweated and stank with people. For one or two old men in new gibbas came out, and one or two younger

men naked and wounded. When we offered them no harm the Khalifa's body-guard broke cover. One second the place might have been an uncouth cemetery; the next it was a gibbering monkey-house. From naked hovels, presto! it turned to naked bodies. Climbing, squeezing, burrowing, they came out like vermin from a burning coat.

They were just as skinny and shabby as any other dervishes; as the Omdurman Guards they were a failure. They were all very friendly, the men anxious to tell what they knew of the Khalifa's movements—which was nothing—the women overjoyed to fetch drinks of water. But when they were told to bring out their arms and ammunition they became a bit sticky, as soldiers say. They looked like refusing, and a snap-shot round a corner which killed a black soldier began to look nasty. There must have been thousands of them all about us, all under cover, all knowing every twist and turn of their warren. But a confident front imposed on them, as it will on all savages. A raised voice, a hand on the shoulder—and they were slipping away to their dens and slouching back with Remingtons and bandoliers. The first came very, very slowly; as the pile grew they came quicker and quicker. From crawling they changed in five minutes to a trot; they smiled all over, and informed zealously against anybody who hung back. Why not? Three masterless hours will hardly wipe out the rest of a lifetime of slavery.

Maxwell Bey left a guard over the arms, and went back: it was not in this compartment that we should find the Khalifa. We went on through the walled street along the river-front; the gunboats were still Maximing now and again a cable or two ahead. So on, until we came to the southern river corner of the hold, and here was a winding, ascending path between two higher, stouter walls than ever. Here was a stouter wooden gate; it must be here. In this enclosure, too, was a multitude of dwellings, but larger and more amply spaced. The Sirdar overtook us now, and the guns: the gunners had cut their road and levelled the breach, and tugged the first gate off its hinges. On; we must be coming to it now. We were quite close upon the towering, shell-torn skeleton of the Mahdi's tomb. The way broadened to a square. But the sun had some time struck level into our eyes. He went down; in ten minutes it would be dark. Now or never! Here we were opposite the tomb; to our left front was the Khalifa's own palace. We were there, if only he was. A section of blacks filed away to the left through the walled passage that led to the door. Another filed to the right, behind the tomb, towards his private iron mosque. We waited. We waited. And then, on left and right, they reappeared, rather draggingly.

Gone! None could know it for certain till the place had been searched through as well as the darkness would let it. Next morning some of the

smaller Emirs avowed that they knew it. He had been supposed to be surrounded, but who could stop every earth in such a spinny? He had bolted out of one door as we went in at another.

We filed back. For the present we had missed the crowning capture. But going back under the wall we found a very good assurance that Abudullahi was no more a ruler. The street under the wall was now a breathless stream of men and women, all carrying baskets—the whole population of the Khalifa's capital racing to pilfer the Khalifa's grain. There was no doubt about their good disposition now. They salaamed with enthusiasm, and "lued" most genuinely; one flat-nosed black lady forgot propriety so far as to kiss my hand. Wonderful workings of the savage mind! Six hours before they were dying in regiments for their master; now they were looting his corn. Six hours before they were slashing our wounded to pieces; now they were asking us for coppers.

By this time the darkling streets were choked with the men and horses and guns and camels of the inpouring army. You dragged along a mile an hour, clamped immovably into a mass of troops. A hundred good spearmen now—but the Dervishes were true savages to the end: they had decided that they were beaten, and beaten they remained. Soon it was pitchy night; where the bulk of the army bivouacked, I know not, neither do they. I stumbled on the Second British Brigade, which had

had a relatively easy day, and there, by a solitary candle, the Sirdar, flat on his back, was dictating his despatch to Colonel Wingate, flat on his belly. I scraped a short hieroglyphic scrawl on a telegraph form, and fell asleep on the gravel with a half-eaten biscuit in my mouth.

Next morning the army awoke refreshed, and was able to appreciate to the full the beauties of Omdurman. When you saw it close, and by the light of day, the last suggestion of stateliness vanished. It had nothing left but size—mere stupid multiplication of rubbish. One or two relics of civilisation were found. Taps in the Khalifa's bath; a ship's chronometer; a small pair of compasses in a boy's writing-desk, and a larger pair modelled clumsily upon them; the drooping telegraph wire and cable to Khartum; Gordon's old "Bordein," a shell-torn husk of broken wood round engines that still worked marvellously; a few half-naked Egyptians, once Government servants; Charles Neufeld, the captive German merchant, quoting Schiller over his ankle-chains; Sister Teresa, the captive nun, forcibly married to a Greek, presenting a green orange to Colonel Wingate, the tried friend she had never seen before,—such was the pathetic flotsam overtaken by the advancing wave of Mahdism, now stranded by its ebb.

The Mahdi's tomb was shoddy brick, and you dared not talk in it lest the rest of the dome should come on your head. The inside was tawdry panels and

railings round a gaudy pall. The Khalifa's house was the house of a well-to-do-fellah, and a dead donkey putrified under its window-holes. The arsenal was the reduplication of all the loot that has gone for half a dollar apiece these three years. The great mosque was a wall round a biggish square with a few stick-and-thatch booths at one end of it. The iron mosque was a galvanised shed, and would have repulsed the customers of a third-rate country photographer. Everything was wretched.

And foul. They dropped their dung where they listed; they drew their water from beside green sewers; they had filled the streets and khors with dead donkeys; they left their brothers to rot and puff up hideously in the sun. The stench of the place was in your nostrils, in your throat, in your stomach. You could not eat; you dared not drink. Well you could believe that this was the city where they crucified a man to steal a handful of base dollars, and sold mother and daughter together to be divided five hundred miles apart, to live and die in the same bestial concubinage.

The army moved out to Khor Shamba during the 3rd. The accursed place was left to fester and fry in its own filth and lust and blood. The reek of its abominations steamed up to heaven to justify us of our vengeance.

XXXV.

THE FUNERAL OF GORDON.

THE steamers—screws, paddles, stern-wheelers—plug-plugged their steady way up the full Nile. Past the northern fringe of Omdurman where the sheikh came out with the white flag, past the breach where we went in to the Khalifa's stronghold, past the choked embrasures and the lacerated Mahdi's tomb, past the swamp-rooted palms of Tuti Island. We looked at it all with a dispassionate, impersonal curiosity. It was Sunday morning, and that furious Friday seemed already half a lifetime behind us. The volleys had dwindled out of our ears, and the smoke out of our nostrils; and to-day we were going to the funeral of Gordon. After nearly fourteen years the Christian soldier was to have Christian burial.

On the steamers there was a detachment of every corps, white or black or yellow, that had taken part in the vengeance. Every white officer that could be spared from duty was there, fifty men picked from each British battalion, one or two from each unit of

the Egyptian army. That we were going up to Khartum at all was evidence of our triumph; yet, if you looked about you, triumph was not the note. The most reckless subaltern, the most barbarous black, was touched with gravity. We were going to perform a necessary duty, which had been put off far, far too long.

Fourteen years next January—yet even through that humiliating thought there ran a whisper of triumph. We may be slow; but in that very slowness we show that we do not forget. Soon or late, we give our own their due. Here were men that fought for Gordon's life while he lived,—Kitchener, who went disguised and alone among furious enemies to get news of him; Wauchope, who poured out his blood like water at Tamai and Kirbekan; Stuart-Wortley, who missed by but two days the chance of dying at Gordon's side. And here, too, were boys who could hardly lisp when their mothers told them that Gordon was dead, grown up now and appearing in the fulness of time to exact eleven thousand lives for one. Gordon may die—other Gordons may die in the future—but the same clean-limbed brood will grow up and avenge them.

The boats stopped plugging and there was silence. We were tying up opposite a grove of tall palms; on the bank was a crowd of natives curiously like the backsheesh-hunters who gather to greet the Nile steamers. They stared at us; but we looked beyond

them to a large building rising from a crumbling quay. You could see that it had once been a handsome edifice of the type you know in Cairo or Alexandria—all stone and stucco, two-storied, faced with tall regular windows. Now the upper storey was clean gone; the blind windows were filled up with bricks; the stucco was all scars, and you could walk up to the roof on rubble. In front was an acacia, such as grow in Ismailia or the Gezireh at Cairo, only unpruned—deep luscious green, only drooping like a weeping willow. At that most ordinary sight everybody grew very solemn. For it was a piece of a new world, or rather of an old world, utterly different from the squalid mud, the baking barrenness of Omdurman. A façade with tall windows, a tree with green leaves—the façade battered and blind, the tree drooping to earth—there was no need to tell us we were at a grave. In that forlorn ruin, and that disconsolate acacia, the bones of murdered civilisation lay before us.

The troops formed up before the palace in three sides of a rectangle—Egyptians to our left as we looked from the river, British to the right. The Sirdar, the generals of division and brigade, and the staff stood in the open space facing the palace. Then on the roof—almost on the very spot where Gordon fell, though the steps by which the butchers mounted have long since vanished—we were aware of two flagstaves. By the right-hand halliards stood Lieutenant Staveley, R.N., and Captain Watson, K.R.R.; by the left hand

Bimbashi Mitford and his Excellency's Egyptian A.D.C.

The Sirdar raised his hand. A pull on the halliards: up ran, out flew, the Union Jack, tugging eagerly at his reins, dazzling gloriously in the sun, rejoicing in his strength and his freedom. "Bang!" went the "Melik's" 12½-pounder, and the boat quivered to her backbone. "God Save our Gracious Queen" hymned the Guards' band—"bang!" from the "Melik"—and Sirdar and private stood stiff—"bang!"—to attention, every hand at the helmet peak in—"bang!"—salute. The Egyptian flag had gone up at the same instant; and now, the same ear-smashing, soul-uplifting bangs marking time, the band of the 11th Sudanese was playing the Khedivial hymn. "Three cheers for the Queen!" cried the Sirdar: helmets leaped in the air, and the melancholy ruins woke to the first wholesome shout of all these years. Then the same for the Khedive. The comrade flags stretched themselves lustily, enjoying their own again; the bands pealed forth the pride of country; the twenty-one guns banged forth the strength of war. Thus, white men and black, Christian and Moslem, Anglo-Egypt set her seal once more, for ever, on Khartum.

Before we had time to think such thoughts over to ourselves, the Guards were playing the Dead March in "Saul." Then the black band was playing the march from Handel's "Scipio," which in England generally goes with "Toll for the Brave"; this was in memory

of those loyal men among the Khedive's subjects who could have saved themselves by treachery, but preferred to die with Gordon. Next fell a deeper hush than ever, except for the solemn minute guns that had followed the fierce salute. Four chaplains—Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist—came slowly forward and ranged themselves, with their backs to the palace, just before the Sirdar. The Presbyterian read the Fifteenth Psalm. The Anglican led the rustling whisper of the Lord's Prayer. Snow-haired Father Brindle, best beloved of priests, laid his helmet at his feet, and read a memorial prayer bare-headed in the sun. Then came forward the pipers and wailed a dirge, and the Sudanese played "Abide with me." Perhaps lips did twitch just a little to see the ebony heathens fervently blowing out Gordon's favourite hymn; but the most irresistible incongruity would hardly have made us laugh at that moment. And there were those who said the cold Sirdar himself could hardly speak or see, as General Hunter and the rest stepped out according to their rank and shook his hand. What wonder? He has trodden this road to Khartum for fourteen years, and he stood at the goal at last.

Thus with Maxim-Nordenfeldt and Bible we buried Gordon after the manner of his race. The parade was over, the troops were dismissed, and for a short space we walked in Gordon's garden. Gordon has become a legend with his countrymen, and they all

but deify him dead who would never have heard of him had he lived. But in this garden you somehow came to know Gordon the man, not the myth, and to feel near to him. Here was an Englishman doing his duty, alone and at the instant peril of his life; yet still he loved his garden. The garden was a yet more pathetic ruin than the palace. The palace accepted its doom mutely: the garden strove against it. Untrimmed, unwatered, the oranges and citrons still struggled to bear their little, hard, green knobs, as if they had been full ripe fruit. The pomegranates put out their vermilion star-flowers, but the fruit was small and woody and juiceless. The figs bore better, but they, too, were small and without vigour. Rankly overgrown with dhurra, a vine still trailed over a low roof its pale leaves and limp tendrils, but yielded not a sign of grapes. It was all green, and so far vivid and refreshing after Omdurman. But it was the green of nature, not of cultivation: leaves grew large and fruit grew small, and dwindled away. Reluctantly, despairingly, Gordon's garden was dropping back to wilderness. And in the middle of the defeated fruit-trees grew rankly the hateful Sodom apple, the poisonous herald of desolation.

The bugle broke in upon us; we went back to the boats. We were quicker steaming back than steaming up. We were not a whit less chastened, but every man felt lighter. We came with a sigh of shame: we went away with a sigh of relief. The long-delayed

duty was done. The bones of our countrymen were shattered and scattered abroad, and no man knows their place; none the less Gordon had his due burial at last. So we steamed away to the roaring camp and left him alone again. Yet not one nor two looked back at the mouldering palace and the tangled garden with a new and a great contentment. We left Gordon alone again—but alone in majesty under the conquering ensign of his own people.

XXXVI.

AFTER THE CONQUEST.

THE curtain comes down; the tragedy of the Sudan is played out. Sixteen years of toilsome failure, of toilsome, slow success, and at the end we have fought our way triumphantly to the point where we began.

It has cost us much, and it has profited us—how little? It would be hard to count the money, impossible to measure the blood. Blood goes by quality as well as quantity; who can tell what future deeds we lost when we lost Gordon and Stewart and Earle, Burnaby who rode to Khiva, and Owen who rode Father O'Flynn? By shot and steel, by sunstroke and pestilence, by sheer wear of work, the Sudan has eaten up our best by hundreds. Of the men who escaped with their lives, hundreds more will bear the mark of its fangs till they die; hardly one of them but will die the sooner for the Sudan. And what have we to show in return?

At first you think we have nothing; then you think again, and see we have very much. We have gained

precious national self-respect. We wished to keep our hands clear of the Sudan; we were drawn unwillingly to meddle with it; we blundered when we suffered Gordon to go out; we fiddled and failed when we tried to bring him back. We were humiliated and we were out of pocket; we had embarked in a foolish venture, and it had turned out even worse than anybody had foreseen. Now this was surely the very point where a nation of shopkeepers should have cut its losses and turned to better business elsewhere. If we were the sordid counter-jumpers that Frenchmen try to think us, we should have ruled a red line, and thought no more of a worthless land, bottomless for our gold, thirsty for our blood. We did nothing such. We tried to; but our dogged fighting dander would not let us. We could not sit down till the defeat was redeemed. We gave more money; we gave the lives of men we loved—and we conquered the Sudan again. Now we can permit ourselves to think of it in peace.

The vindication of our self-respect was the great treasure we won at Khartum, and it was worth the price we paid for it. Most people will hardly persuade themselves there is not something else thrown in. The trade of the Sudan? For now and for many years you may leave that out of the account. The Sudan is a desert, and a depopulated desert. Northward of Khartum it is a wilderness; southward it is a devastation. It was always a poor country, and it always must be. Slaves and ivory were its wealth in

the old time, but now ivory is all but exterminated, and slaves must be sold no more. Gum-arabic and ostrich feathers and Dongola dates will hardly buy cotton stuffs enough for Lancashire to feel the difference.

From Halfa to above Berber, where rain never falls, the Nile only licks the lip of the desert. The father of Egypt is the stepfather of the Sudan. With the help of water-wheels and water-hoists a few patches of corn and fodder can be grown, enough for a dotted population on the bank. But hardly anywhere does the area of vegetation push out more than a mile from the stream; oftener it is a matter of yards. Such a country can never be rich. But why not irrigate? Simply because every pint of water you take out of the Nile for the Sudan means a pint less for Egypt. And it so happens that at this very moment the new barrages at Assuan and Assiut are making the distribution of water to Egypt more precise and scientific than ever. Lower Egypt is to be enlarged; Upper Egypt is, in part at least, to secure permanent irrigation, independent of the Nile flood, and therewith two crops a-year. This means a more rigid economy of water than ever, and who will give a thought to the lean Sudan? What it can dip up in buckets fat Egypt will never miss, and that it may take—no more.

As for the southward lands, they get rain, to be sure, and so far they are cultivable; only there is

nobody left to cultivate them. For three years now the Egyptian army has been marching past broken mud hovels by the river-side. Dust has blown over their foundations, Dead Sea fruit grows rankly within their walls. Sometimes, as in old Berber, you come on a city with streets and shops—quite ruined and empty. Here lived the Sudanese whom the Khalifa has killed out. And in the more fertile parts of the Sudan it is the same. Worse still—in that the very fertility woke up the cupidity of the Baggara, and the owner was driven out, sold in the slave-market, shipped up Nile to die of Fashoda fever, cut to pieces, crucified, impaled—anything you like, so long as the Khalifa's fellow-tribesmen got his land. In Kordofan, even of old days, lions in bad years would attack villages in bands: to-day they openly dispute the mastery of creation with men. From Abyssinia to Wadai swelters the miserable Sudan—beggarly, empty, weed-grown, rank with blood.

It will recover,—with time, no doubt, but it will recover. Only, meanwhile, it will want some tending. There is not likely to be much trouble in the way of fighting: in the present weariness of slaughter the people will be but too glad to sit down under any decent Government. There is no reason—unless it be complications with outside Powers, like France or Abyssinia—why the old Egyptian empire should not be reoccupied up to the Albert Nyanza and Western

Darfur. But if this is done—and done it surely should be—two things must be remembered. First, it must be militarily administered for many years to come, and that by British men. Take the native Egyptian official even to-day. No words can express his ineptitude, his laziness, his helplessness, his dread of responsibility, his maddening red-tape formalism. His panacea in every unexpected case is the same. "It must be put in writing; I must ask for instructions." He is no longer corrupt—at least, no longer so corrupt as he was—but he would be if he dared. The native officer is better than the civilian official; but even with him it is the exception to find a man both capable and incorruptible. To put Egyptians, corrupt, lazy, timid, often rank cowards, to rule the Sudan, would be to invite another Mahdi as soon as the country had grown up enough to make him formidable.

The Sudan must be ruled by military law strong enough to be feared, administered by British officers just enough to be respected. For the second point, it must not be expected that it will pay until many years have passed. The cost of a military administration would not be very great, but it must be considered money out of pocket. The experience of Dongola, whence the army has been drawing large stores of dhurra, where the number of water-wheels has multiplied itself enormously in less than a couple of years, shows well enough that only patience is wanted. The

Sudan will improve: it will never be an Egypt, but it will pay its way. But, before all things, you must give it time to repopulate itself.

Well, then, if Egypt is not to get good places for her people, and is to be out of pocket for administration—how much does Egypt profit by the fall of Abdullahi and the reconquest of the Sudan? Much. Inestimably. For as the master-gain of England is the vindication of her self-respect, so the master-gain of Egypt is the assurance of her security. As long as dervish raiders loomed on the horizon of her frontier, Egypt was only half a State. She lived on a perpetual war-footing. Her finances are pinched enough at the best; every little economy had to go to the Sirdar. Never was general so jealous—even miserly—of public money as the Sirdar; but even so he was spending Egypt's all. That strain will henceforth be loosened. Egypt will have enough work for five years in the new barrages, which are a public work directly transliterable in pounds and piastres. Egypt will be able to give a little attention to her taxes, which are anomalous; to her education, which is backward; to her railways, which are vile.

Whether she will be able to reduce her army is doubtful. The occupation of the banks of the Blue and White Nile, to say nothing of the peaceful reabsorption of Kordofan and Darfur, would open up some of the finest raw fighting material in the world. Frankly, it is very raw indeed—the rawest savagery you can

well imagine,—but British officers and sergeants have made fairly drilled troops, fairly good shots, superb marchers and bayonet-fighters out of the same material, and they could do it again. To put the matter brutally, having this field for recruiting, we have too many enemies in the world to afford to lose it. We have made the Egyptian army, and we have saved Egypt with it and with our own: we should now make of it an African second to our Indian army, and use it, when the time comes, to repay the debt to ourselves.

We have saved Egypt, and thereby we have paid another debt. The Khedive is but half a monarch at the best: while a hostile force sat on his borders to destroy him, and every couple of years actually came down to do it, he was not more than a quarter. There was plenty of sneaking sympathy with Mahdism in Egypt—even in Cairo, and not very far from the Khedive's own palace. But for British help the sympathisers would long ago, but yet too late, have recognised their foolishness in the obliteration of Egypt. Egypt alone could by no miracle have saved herself from utter destruction by Mahdist invasion. We have saved her—and therewith we have paid off the purblind, sincere undertakings of Mr Gladstone. We undertook to leave Egypt; we have redeemed the promise in an unforeseen manner, but we have redeemed it amply. If we undertook to evacuate the old Egypt, we have fathered a new one, saved from imminent extinction by our gold and our sword.

Without us there would have been no Egypt to-day; what we made we shall keep.

That is our double gain—the vindication of our own honour and the vindication of our right to go on making Egypt a country fit to live in. Egypt's gain is her existence to-day. The world's gain is the downfall of the worst tyranny in the world, and the acquisition of a limited opportunity for open trade. The Sudan's gain is immunity from rape and torture and every extreme of misery.

The poor Sudan! The wretched, dry Sudan! Count up all the gains you will, yet what a hideous irony it remains, this fight of half a generation for such an emptiness. People talk of the Sudan as the East; it is not the East. The East has age and colour; the Sudan has no colour and no age—just a monotone of squalid barbarism. It is not a country; it has nothing that makes a country. Some brutish institutions it has, and some bloodthirsty chivalry. But it is not a country: it has neither nationality, nor history, nor arts, nor even natural features. Just the Nile—the niggard Nile refusing himself to the desert—and for the rest there is absolutely nothing to look at in the Sudan. Nothing grows green. Only yellow halfa-grass to make you stumble, and sapless mimosa to tear your eyes; dom-palms that mock with wooden fruit, and Sodom apples that lure with flatulent poison. For beasts it has tarantulas and scorpions and serpents, devouring white ants, and every kind

of loathsome bug that flies or crawls. Its people are naked and dirty, ignorant and besotted. It is a quarter of a continent of sheer squalor. Overhead the pitiless furnace of the sun, under foot the never-easing treadmill of the sand, dust in the throat, tuneless singing in the ears, searing flame in the eye,—the Sudan is a God-accursed wilderness, an empty limbo of torment for ever and ever.

Surely enough, "When Allah made the Sudan," say the Arabs, "he laughed." You can almost hear the fiendish echo of it crackling over the fiery sand. And yet—and yet there never was an Englishman who had been there, but was ready and eager to go again. "Drink of Nile water," say the same Arabs, "and you will return to drink it again." Nile water is either very brown or very green, according to the season; yet you do go back and drink it again. Perhaps to Englishmen—half-savage still on the pinnacle of their civilisation—the very charm of the land lies in its empty barbarism. There is space in the Sudan. There is the fine, purified desert air, and the long stretching gallops over its sand. There are the things at the very back of life, and no other to posture in front of them,—hunger and thirst to assuage, distance to win through, pain to bear, life to defend, and death to face. You have gone back to the spring water of your infancy. You are a savage again—a savage with Rosbach water, if there is any left, and a Mauser repeating pistol-carbine, if the sand has not jammed

it, but still at the last word a savage. You are unprejudiced, simple, free. You are a naked man, facing naked nature.

I do not believe that any of us who come home whole will think, from our easy-chairs, unkindly of the Sudan.

THE END.

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